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THE

# WORKS

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# HANNAH MORE.

A NEW EDITION,

WITH ADDITIONS AND CORRECTIONS,

IN ELEVEN VOLUMES.

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VOL. IX.

CHRISTIAN MORALS.

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# CHRISTIAN MORALS.

In moral actions, Divine law helpeth exceedingly the law of Reason to guide a man's life; but in supernatural, it alone guideth. HOOKER.

AS

A SLIGHT MEMORIAL

OF

SINCERE ESTEEM AND CORDIAL FRIENDSHIP,

THIS LITTLE SKETCH

OF

CHRISTIAN MORALS

IS,

WITH STRICT PROPRIETY,

INSCRIBED TO

THE REV. THOMAS GISBORNE,

OF YOXALL LODGE;

IN HIS WRITINGS AND IN HIS LIFE,

A CONSISTENT

CHRISTIAN MORALIST.

# PREFACE.

Mr. Pope in his Essay on Criticism has asserted, that the "last and greatest art" of literary composition is "the art to blot." With a full conviction of the difficulty and the duty of this art, the author of the following pages ventures to insist, even in contradiction to this high authority, that there is, in writing, an art still more rare, still more slowly learned, still more reluctantly adopted — *the art to stop.*

But when shall this difficult, but valuable, art be resorted to? At what precise moment shall we begin to reduce so wholesome a theory to practice? It may be answered — at the period when time may reasonably be suspected to have extinguished the small particle of fire which the fond conceit of the author might tempt him to fancy he once possessed.

But how is he to ascertain this critical moment of extinction? His own eyes, always dim in the discernment of his own faults, may have become quite blind. His friends are too timid, or too tender, to hazard the perilous intimation. If his enemies, always kindly ready to perform this

neglected office of friendship, proclaim the unwelcome truth, they are probably not believed. The public, then, who are neither governed by the misleadings of affection, nor influenced by the hostility of hatred, would seem to be the proper arbiters, the court from whose decision there should lie no appeal.

But if, through generous partiality to good intentions, or habitual kindness to long acquaintance, that public, instead of checking, continue to cherish the efforts which they have been accustomed to indulge, and the author be tempted still to persist in writing, may he not be in imminent danger of wearing out the good humour of his protectors, by a successive reproduction of himself—of abusing their kindness, by the vapid exhibition of an exhausted intellect?

May the writer of the following pages, without incurring too heavily the imputation of vanity, be permitted to observe, that there is a sense in which the favour she has uniformly experienced is honourable to that public who have conferred it? Their indulgence has never been purchased by flattery; their support has never been a payment for softening errors that require, not to be qualified, but combated; has never been a reward for incense offered to the passions, for sentiments accommodated to whatever appeared to be defective in any reigning opinion, in any prevailing practice. They have received with approbation unvarnished truth, and even borne with patience bold remonstrance. In return, she is willing to hope, that she has paid

them a more subtantial respect, by this hazardous sincerity, than if she had endeavoured to conciliate their regard by indirect arts and unworthy adulation.

Next to injuring any reader, her deepest regret would be to offend him; but when the questions agitated are of momentous concern, would not disguising truth, or palliating error, be, as to the intention, the worst of injuries, however powerless the writer might be in making a bad intention effectively mischievous? Sincere, therefore, as would be her concern, if any stroke of her pen

> Should tend to make one worthy man her foe,

yet the feeling of having contributed to mislead a single youthful mind, by the suppression of a right, or the establishment of a false principle, would be more painful than any censures which an imprudent honesty might draw down upon her.

If the humble work now presented to the world be of little use to the reader, the writer is willing to hope it may not be altogether unprofitable to herself. If it induce her more strenuously to cultivate the habit of rendering speculation practical, if it should dispose her to adopt more cordially what she is so prompt to recommend, she will then have turned to some little account the hours of pain and suffering under which it has been composed.

She does not, however, absurdly presume to plead pain and suffering as an apology for defects in a work which she was at liberty not to have

undertaken; for, with whatever other evils sickness may be chargeable, it imposes on no one the necessity of adding one more to the countless catalogue of indifferent books.

*Barley Wood,*
*December* 10. 1812.

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# CHRISTIAN MORALS.

## CHAP. I.

### ON THE WRITERS OF PIOUS BOOKS.

ALL the things in this world carry in them such evident marks of imperfection, are so liable to be infected with error, good is separated from evil by such slight partitions, and the deflection from what is right is so easy, that even undertakings which should seem most exempt from danger, are yet insecure in their conduct, and uncertain in their issue. Writing a soundly religious book might seem to put in the claim of an exempt case; but does experience prove that the exemption is infallible? The employment is good, the motive is likely to be pure; the work may be unexceptionable in its tendency, and useful in its consequences. But is it always beneficial to the writer in the proportion in which he intends it to be profitable to the reader? Even of the reader, is his own improvement always the leading aim? Does a critical spirit never diminish the benefit which the book was calculated to convey? If

he is convinced by the more essential truths it imparts, is not some trivial disagreement of opinion, in a matter on which persons may differ without any charge against the piety of either, made to defeat all the ends of improvement? Is not an insignificant, perhaps an ill-founded objection, suffered to invalidate the merit of the whole work? Is not this eagerly-detected fault triumphantly kept in the foreground, while all that is valuable is overlooked, and its efficacy defeated; the criticism being at once intended to give prominence to the error of the writer, and the sagacity of the critic? Another reader is probably searching for brilliancy when he should be looking for truth, or he is only seeking a confirmation of his own opinions, when he should rather have been looking for their correction.

As to the writer, is he not in danger of being absorbed in the mechanical part of his work, till religious composition dwindles into a mere secular operation? May he not be diverted from his main object by an over-attention to elegance, to correctness, to ornament; — all which indeed are necessary; for if he would benefit he must be read, if he would be read he must please, if he would please he must endeavour to excel; — but may he not, in taking some, take too much pains to please, and so become less solicitous to benefit, to the injury both of his reader and himself? May

not the very lopping and pruning his work, the flowers which he is anxiously sticking into it, the little decorations with which he is setting off those parts which he fears may be thought dry and dull, raise a sensation in his mind not unlike that which a vain beauty feels in tricking out her person? May he not, by too much confidence in his own powers, be blind to errors obvious to all but himself; or else may he not use the file too assiduously, and by over-labour in smoothing the asperities of his style, diminish the force of his meaning, and polish honest vigour into unprofitable elegance?

Some indeed have been so indulgent to authors under their many difficulties, as to allow them a certain mixture of inferior excitement, as an under-help to assist such motives as are more pure. If they did not feel a little too full of their work, when it was under their hand, it has been said, they would not devote to it the full force of their mind. This anxiety, or rather this absorption, it is presumed, lasts no longer than till the immediate object is accomplished. It retreats indeed, but waits for the author, seizes him again with undiminished force on his next undertaking. If he fancied that his former subject was all in all while his mind was intent upon it, that preference, like the fondness of an animal for its young, which is lost when they no longer need its fostering care, is transferred to the next.

As this ardour in a rightly-turned mind will not be sufficiently durable to ripen into vanity, but will cool as soon as the end for which it was exerted is answered; it will not materially injure the conscientious writer; for he will probably, when the impetus is taken off, as much undervalue his work, as he had before overrated it. But wofully deficient in humility is that author, whose enthusiasm does not subside when it is no longer necessary to keep alive the spirit of his undertaking! Convicted indeed will he be of vanity, who persists in thinking his work as glowing, as when, with a judgment dazzled by his ardour, he viewed it hot, and fresh drawn from the furnace!

But perhaps when a man engages in any little service, if he did not in some degree exaggerate its value, in his hope of its utility, he would want one motive for attempting it. Is it not therefore a smaller evil that he should a little magnify its importance to his imagination, than that complete hopelessness should totally deter him from all enterprise? Natural indolence is, in many, too powerful a subduer even of religious exertion, to allow them to work without hope. If hope flatters, she at least supports; thus something is achieved which else would not have been done at all. Again the timid writer foresees that many objections may be raised to his work. This would amount to a disqualifying dejection, did he not

take comfort in the chance that his censors may possibly disagree among themselves as to the points deserving criticism, and that one may even commend what another condemns. Thus his mind is kept in a just equilibrium; without the expectation of censure, he would be vain; without some hope of approbation, even the purity of his intention might not always secure him from despondency.

But though no mixed motives or human feelings in the author ought to interfere with those of the reader, who has only to do with the book, and not with the man, it is of no small moment to himself, that both feelings and motives be pure. It is of the last importance that he do not impose on himself the belief, that he has only the honour of religion at heart, when literary renown, or victory over an adversary, may be the predominating principle. He will also be careful that his best endowments be not converted into implements of injury; he will be cautious that his learning, which is so useful to arm his zeal, do not help to encumber it; that his prudence, which is so necessary to moderate, do not extinguish it.

But if he come off clear from these temptations, other and greater lurk behind. He should bear in mind, that in composing a religious work for the public, he is producing the best part of himself; that he is probably exhibiting himself to others as much better than he

is; for whatever be the faults of his own character, it is his bounden duty to conduct his reader to the highest approach to excellence. Independent of his general defects, he is at least carefully keeping out of sight every vain thought which may have stolen upon him while writing, every evil temper which may have assailed him, every temptation to indulge too ardent a wish that his book may procure praise for himself, as well as benefit to his readers. To flatter himself inordinately on this head, as well as in over-anticipating the great effects it will produce, is not, perhaps, the smallest of his dangers. That very self-knowledge which he has perhaps been inculcating on others, would preserve him from an undue estimation both of himself and his book.

It was the sneer of a witty, but discouraging satyrist, that, "To mend the world's a vast design." It is, indeed, a design, from which the purity of his motive may not always secure the humility of the author. Yet modestly to aim at ameliorating that little portion of it which lies within his immediate sphere, is a duty out of which he should not be laughed by wits and epigrammatists. Instead of indulging unfounded hopes of improbable effects, the Christian writer will be humbled at the mortifying reflection, what great and extensive evil the most insignificant bad man may effect, while so little comparative good can be accom-

plished by the best. But it is to be regretted, that even religion is no sure protection against the intrusion of vanity, that it does not always secure its possessor from over-rating his own agency, from fondly calculating on the unknown benefits which, by his projected work, he is preparing for mankind. A pious Welch minister, many years ago, being about to publish a sermon, previously consulted the writer of these pages how many thousand copies he ought to print. He felt not a little shocked at her advising him to reduce his thousands to hundreds; scores she did not dare advise. As she had foreseen, not half a dozen were sold, except a few, charitably taken off his hands by his friends. At her return soon after, from the metropolis, he hastened to her with all the ardour of impatience, and seriously inquired, whether she had observed any material reformation at the court end of the town, since the publication of his discourse.

Among the many unsuspected but salutary checks to the vanity of a pious writer, it will not be the least, that his very popularity may make the intrinsic value of his work questionable; — that he may be indebted for its favourable reception, not to its excellencies, but its defects, not to the deep, but to the superficial views he has taken of religion; that it may be more acceptable only because it is less searching; that if he has pleased, it may be owing to

his having been more cautious than faithful. If there is reason to suspect that his success arises from his having skimmed the surface of truth, when he ought to have penetrated its depths, that he has reconciled the reader to Christianity and to himself by a disingenuous discretion, by trimming between God and the world, by concealing truths he ought to have brought forward, or by palliating those he durst not disavow; popularity thus obtained, will afford ground of humiliation rather than of triumph. In avoiding these, and all similar errors, he will also not fail to bear in mind, that He who gave the talents, gave also the right bent to the use of them, and that, therefore, he has no more ground for boasting of the application than of the possession.

When he is called upon by the nature of his subject to expatiate strongly on this vice, or to point out the danger of that error, does he never feel a sort of conscious superiority to certain individuals of his acquaintance, who may be infected with either, and, for a moment, be tempted to sit rather in the seat of the scorner, than in that of the counsellor? On such occasions, there is nothing which he will more carefully watch, than the temper of his own mind. When duty compels him to be severe against any false opinion, or wrong practice, he will be cautious not to mix with his just censure, any feeling of disdain, any sentiment

of indignation, against any individual whom he may bear in mind; nor will he indulge the unworthy wonder how such or such a person will be mortified at the exposure of a fault to which he is addicted. Nor will he harbour in his bosom an uncharitable vehemence against those whom the reproof may suit, nor a secret self-complacent certainty, that if *any thing* can do them good, this must do it; that though they hear not Moses and the Prophets, they cannot but listen to his pointed admonitions — that they can never stand out against such persuasions as he has to offer — never resist such arguments as he has prepared for their conviction.

But what is still a more serious danger, has he never been tempted to overlook his own faults while he has been exposing those of others; and this, though the failing he is condemning, may be peculiarly his own? With just indignation against the offence he is reproving, has he never once forgotten to mingle tender compassion for the offender, remembering that he himself is sinful dust and ashes; that he also stands in need of infinite mercy, and has been only rescued by that mercy from being on a level with the worst objects of his just disapprobation?

It would, notwithstanding, be the highest degree of unfairness, to prefer a charge of injustice, hypocrisy, or even inconsistency, against

an author, because his life, in some respects, falls short of the strictness of his writings. It is a disparity almost inseparable from this state of frail mortality. He may have fallen into errors, and yet deserve to have no heavier charge brought against him than he has brought against others. Infirmity of temper, inequality of mind, a heart, though fearing to offend God, yet not sufficiently dead to the world; — these are the lingering effects of sin imperfectly subdued, in a heart which yet longs, prays, and labours for a complete deliverance from all its corruptions.

When a pious writer treats on any awful topic, he writes under a solemn conviction of its vast importance; he trembles at the idea of not being entirely faithful, of not being valiant for the truth, of not being honestly explicit, of not declaring the whole counsel of God. His own heart is deeply impressed with the dignity of his subject, and he deprecates the thought of shrinking from the boldest avowal of every truth, or of withholding the most powerful inforcement to the practice of every virtue. He is apprehensive lest, on the other hand, when he assails vice or error, he should appear to indulge a violent or vindictive spirit, and be magisterially lifting his fallible self into the chair of authority; lest his attack on the vice might be construed into uncharitableness to the man. On the other hand, he is fearful lest, by being

more forbearing, he should be less upright; lest, if he tried to soften, he should deceive; lest, by indulging too much a spirit of conciliation, he should compromise truth for human favour.—Honest though imperfect, sincere though fallible, he endeavours to bring his principles, his faith, and his convictions, into full operation; he warmly declares what he cordially feels, and faithfully testifies what he firmly believes.

But when he comes to act, he is sometimes brought to be too keenly sensible of the very fault in himself, against which he has been cautioning others; deeply does he lament that he feels strong remains in himself of that corruption against which it was not the less his duty to direct his attacks. Some temptation presses him, some infirmity cleaves to him. These unsubdued frailties prove that he is a man, but they do not prove that he is a hypocrite. The truth is, the religious writer is sometimes thought worse than other men, because his book was considered as a pledge that he should be better. It was expected that the faults he described he would avoid; the passions he had blamed he would suppress; the tempers he had exposed he would have subdued. Perhaps it will commonly be found that the reader had expected too much, and the writer had done too little.

The writer on religious topics is, however, the

person who of all others ought to watch himself most narrowly. He has given a public pledge of his principles. He has held out a rule, to which, as others will be looking with a critical eye to discover how far his conduct falls short of it, so he should himself constantly bear in mind the elevation of his own standard; and he will be more circumspect from the persuasion, that not only his own character but that of religion itself will suffer by his departure from it. The consciousness of the inferiority of his practice to his principles, if those principles are truly scriptural, will furnish him with new motives to humility. The solemn dread lest this inconsistency should be produced against him at the last day, is a fresh incentive to higher exertions, stirs him up to augmented vigilance, quickens him to more intense prayer. He experiences at once the contradictory feeling of dreading to appear better than he really is, by the high tone of piety in his compositions, or of making others worse by lowering that tone in order to bring his professions nearer to the level of his life. Perhaps the most humiliating moment he can ever experience is, when by an accidental glance at some former work, he is reminded how little he himself has profited by the very arguments with which he may have successfully combated some error of the reader; when he feels how much his own heart is still under the dominion of that wrong

temper of which he has forcibly exposed the turpitude to the conviction of others.

There is, however, no personal reason which could ever justify his holding out an inferior standard. If there is any point in which he eminently excels, he has the best of all possible reasons for pressing it upon others — his own experience of its excellence. If there be any in which he unhappily fails, he is clearly justified in recommending it from the humbling sense of his own deficiency in it. Thus he will in either case inforce truth with equal energy, from causes diametrically opposite. Is it not then obvious that as there is no vanity in insisting on a virtue because the writer possesses it, so there is no hypocrisy in recommending a quality because he himself is destitute of it?

But if, through the so frequently alleged imperfection attached to humanity, Christian writers do not always attain to the excellence they suggest, let us not therefore infer that their principles are defective, their aims low, or their practical attainments mean. Let us not suspect that it is not the endeavour of their life, as much as the desire of their heart, to maintain a conduct which shall not discredit their profession. Above all, let us be cautious of concluding that they do not believe what they teach, because they have passions like other men; provided we observe them struggling with those passions, and making a progress in

their conquest over them, though that progress be impeded by natural infirmity, though it be obstructed by occasional irritation. The triumphant detector of the discordance between the author and his book knows not the secret regrets, hears not the fervent prayers, witnesses not the penitential sorrows, which a deep sense of this disagreement produces in the self-abasing heart. To instance in a familiar case: —In the heat of conversation with the author, he has probably marked an impatient word, a hasty expression, a rash judgment; these he treasures up, and produces against him; but he does not hear, in the writer's nightly review of the errors of that day, his self-rebuke for this unsubdued impetuosity, his resolutions against it, the earnest prayer which perhaps at this moment is carrying forward the gradual subjugation of his temper.

Yet his reputation might suffer in another way; for if the critic could hear these humbling confessions of the writers in question, he would be ready to conclude that they were "Sinners above all the Galileans." Whereas the truth most probably is, that they are so alive to the perception of the evil of their own hearts, that things which would be slight faults in the estimation of the accuser, to them appear grave offences. Things which they lament as evils of magnitude, would to the less tender conscience be impalpable, imperceptible. For instance,

— While the caviller would call even the omission of prayer a venial fault; *they* would call a heartless prayer a sin; where the one would think all was well if the literal performance had not been neglected, the other would be uneasy under the exterior observance, if he felt that the spirit had not accompanied the form. The reprover might even accuse the serious Christian of absurdity, should he have overheard him humbling himself for something which was obviously a virtue. He was not, however, so preposterously humble, as to make the virtue the ground of his regret — he was abasing himself for some vanity, which like an excrescence had grown out of it, some inattention which like a poison had mixed with it. When a humble man meditates on his vices, and an irreligious man on his virtues, the vices of the one might be sometimes deemed about as unsubstantial as the virtues of the other actually are.

It is to be lamented that some of our modern elegant divines do not strengthen the foundation, nor add security to the columns, which support the temple; they furnish, however, "the knops and the pomegranates" which decorate it. It is, perhaps, something to *attract* to religion; the attracted may become the *enquiring*; the enquiring may become the *converted.*

The writer of good books, in common with

other authors, is exposed to one danger from which other men are more exempt, that of being so immediately the object of his own attention. This may lead him to be too full of himself. His intellect is even more constantly before his eyes than the form and face of the beauty are before hers. But if in this exercise he may be tempted to think too well of his understanding, the mischief will be counteracted by the advantage which such a close view may bring to his heart. The faults he reprehends in general, will bring his own faults more forcibly before him, and it will be a humbling consideration which he will not fail to press home on himself, to reflect, that he is better able to penetrate into the recesses of the erring hearts of others, from the sympathies of his own.

Repeated and successful pains have been taken by some popular wits *, in whom levity has answered the end of malice, to lower the value of pious instruction, by exposing the discrepancy between the exhortation and the exhorter. They have ingeniously invented cases and situations in which the clergyman is preaching powerfully and efficaciously on the duty of submission to the divine will; immediately after which, they contrive to betray him into a paroxysm of overwhelming impatience at some great domestic calamity of his own. This, as it tends to make the infirmity of sincere

* Goldsmith, Fielding, &c. &c.

Christians a matter of triumph, could only have been done with a view to make them ridiculous; a laugh is cheaply though not very honourably raised, and the insignificance or hollowness of religious instruction perhaps indelibly stamped on the mind of the young reader. But supposing the circumstances to have been real, ought the frail affections, ought the conscious infirmity of these good men to have led them to withhold from their audiences the necessity of Christian resignation? Such instances of natural feeling in certain stages of a progressive piety, neither prove religion to be powerless, nor its professor deceitful. Was the fervent, but fallible Apostle, who, in a moment of infirmity, denied his Master, a hypocrite, when he said, "Though all the world should be offended, yet will not I?"

Yet is this captious spirit an additional reason why the pious writer should guard against excesses in feeling, which, if the reader could witness, he would exultingly reiterate the vulgar but melancholy truism — *How much easier it is to preach than to practise!* How gladly would he have brought the conduct to confront the counsel, and have missed all the benefit of the discourse, by the disclosure of the failing!

But allowing the worst — granting that the writer is not in all points exemplary; if we resolve never to read a work of instruction because the author had faults, Lord Bacon's

inexhaustible mine of intellectual wealth might have still lain unexplored. Luther, the man to whom the Protestant world owes more than to any other uninspired being, might remain unread, because he is said to have wanted the meekness of Melancthon. Even the divine instructions conveyed in the book of Ecclesiastes would have been written in vain.

It is not necessary that the writer under consideration should, like the sacred penman, criminate himself. Their ingenuous self-abasement added weight to the truth of their general testimony, and was doubtless directed by the Holy Spirit, as well for this purpose, as for the humiliation of the offending historian. But above all it is calculated to show that the renovation of hearts so imperfect was the work of the Spirit of God.

Though the pious writer in these days is not called upon to exercise this self-disparaging egotism, yet let not his silence on this head be attributed to a desire that he may be thought a better man than Moses, who heroically perpetuated the memory of that offence which was an inhibition to his entering the land of promise — nor than David the recorder of his own sins, the enormity of which could only be exceeded by the intensity of his repentance — nor than Saint Paul, who published himself to have been a blasphemer and a persecutor. — If the best men among us have, through the pre-

venting grace of God, been preserved from the signal offences of Prophets and Apostles, they will themselves be the foremost to acknowledge how, beyond all comparison, they are below them, in that devotedness of spirit, that contempt of earthly things, and that annihilation of self, which so eminently characterised those inspired Servants of God.

But suppose we were to go farther — even if it could be proved that some individual charge had *not* been altogether unfounded. Even this possible evil in the man, would not invalidate the truths he has been teaching. Balaam, though a bad man, prophesied truly. Erasmus, whose piety is almost as doubtful, as his wit and learning were unquestionable, yet by throwing both into the right scale, was a valuable instrument in effecting the great work in which he was concerned. Erasmus powerfully assisted the reformation, though it is not quite so clear that the reformation essentially benefited Erasmus.

If, then, the writer advances unanswerable arguments in the cause of truth, if he impressively enforces its practical importance, his character, even if defective, should not invalidate his reasoning. Though we allow that even to the reader it is far more satisfactory when the life illustrates the writing, yet we must never bring the conduct of the man as any infallible test of the truth of his doctrine. Allow this, and the reverse of the proposition will be

pleaded against us. Take the opposite case. Do we ever produce certain moral qualities which Hobbes, Bayle, Hume, and other sober sceptics possessed, as arguments for adopting their opinions? Do we infer, as a necessary consequence, that their sentiments are sound, because their lives were not flagitious?

But though it is an awful possibility, that the same work may at once promote God's glory and prove a danger to the instrument that promotes it, — that the opulence of the very mind which is advancing religion, may be used by the owner to his hurt, — that he may be so absorbed in it as a business, that he may lose sight of his end, — that he may neglect personal, while he is advancing public religion, — or be so anxious for the success of his work, that he cannot commit the event to heaven: let us thankfully profit by the truths he teaches; bless God that he has been useful to us; and pray that his errors may not be imputed to him.

Many a sincere Christian will confess that when he is writing in an animated strain in the cause of religion, there are moments in which, from imbecility of mind, or infirmity of body, or failure of animal spirits, while he is promoting the spiritual interests of others, he is inwardly lamenting his own deadness to the very things on which he is insisting. He however perseveres; like the army of Gideon, "faint yet pursuing," he suffers not the feeling

to obstruct the act, till, as a reward for his perseverance, the act brings back the feeling. Were it suspected that some of his most approved pages were written under this declension of zeal, what a clamour would be raised against his inconsistency, when his merit — if we dare use the word merit — consists in overcoming the languor of his spirit, and in acting as if he felt it not. His depression may in fact have been augmented by his humility. He has trembled lest the solemnity with which he has been calling upon others, should not stir up his own feelings; lest the arguments which were intended to alarm the reader, should leave his own heart cold and unaffected.

While it is of the nature of scientific principles to adapt themselves only to one particular bent of mind, and of the inventive powers to address persons of imagination only: it is the character of Christianity, and should be the aim of the Christian writer, to accommodate their instructions to every class of society, to every degree of intellect, to every quality of mind, to every cast of temper. Christianity does not interfere with any particular form of study, any political propensity, any professional engagement, any legitimate pursuit. It claims to incorporate itself with the ideas of every intelligent mind which lies open to receive it; it infuses itself, when not repelled, into the character of every individual, as it originally as-

similated itself to that of every government, without sacrificing any thing of its specific quality, without requiring any mind of a peculiar make for its reception.

Without altering its properties by any infusions of his own, a judicious writer will always consider how he may render it most acceptable to the capacity of the general recipient. To exclude reason from religion, he knows is not the way to attract argumentative men to enquire into its truth; — to exclude elegance from its exhibition, is not the probable method to invite men of taste to speculate on its beauty. If, however, the writer possess little of the graces which embellish truth, if he cannot adorn it with those charms which, though they add nothing to its lustre, yet attract to its contemplation; still plain sense and unaffected piety may contribute to the production of a work which may prove useful to a large and valuable proportion of readers. But here if genius is not essential, good taste is never to be dispensed with. A sound judgment will be requisite to prevent piety from being repulsive to readers, who have been accustomed to view other intellectual subjects exhibited in all the proprieties of which they are severally susceptible. Let them not see a subject of this transcendent importance, injured by any debasing mixture, disfigured by any coarseness of language, nor degraded by any vulgar associations

On the other hand, while some object so strenuously against the introduction of the affections into religion, what are we to understand from it, but that, in the opinion of the objectors, a man will write the better because he does not feel his subject, — that he will teach religion more safely to others, from not having felt its influence on his own heart, — that he will make a deeper impression by writing from books than from himself, or rather that making an impression at all is a dangerous thing, — that it is of the nature of enthusiasm, proceeding from it, and productive of it; — that therefore it is better that the reader should not be impressed, but only informed.

But the sound and sober Christian takes the best precaution against infusing a fanatical spirit by not possessing it. He cannot communicate the distemper of which he is not sick. He cautiously avoids it on a double ground. He knows that enthusiasm and superstition are not only mischievous in their nature, but *that* they furnish the profane with a plausible argument against religion itself. He remembers, and applies the observation, that to some Pagan poets, especially Lucretius, these errors supplied Atheism with her most powerful arms. But though he allows that enthusiasm is dangerous, he continues to write like one who knows that it is not the exclusive danger of the age; like one who is convinced that frenzy is not the

only distemper in our spiritual bills of mortality; like one whose heart is warmed, not by animal pulsation, but by those quickening oracles of truth which carry in them "the demonstration of the spirit and of power;" like one who feels that religion is not a misleading fire, but an animating principle which at once enlarges his views, elevates his aims, and ennobles his character.

But to return to the reader. — If we had no higher reason to aim at improvement in piety, one would almost think that the mere feelings of gratitude and good nature might tempt us to show our affection to our pious benefactors, by profiting from their exhortations, their counsels, their persuasions. It might almost touch a heart dead to superior considerations, to reflect how many departed worthies have wasted their strength, as to us, in vain. Among the witnesses who will appear against us in the great day of account, *they* will stand the foremost. Let us tremble as we figure to ourselves our unwilling accusers in that band of holy men, who earnestly sought to draw us, not to themselves, but to those treasures of inspiration, of which they were the faithful expositors; to the Prophets and Apostles, — "to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to God the judge of all."

And is it not a cruel return to refuse those who still meekly wait the effect of their labours upon earth, the honest gratification of seeing

that we have derived some little advantage from their exertions? Let us show them that they have not offered up the fervent prayers which doubtless accompanied their unwearied labours to no end. While so many saints are now rejoicing in heaven, in the society of those whom their holy labours were made instrumental in bringing thither; let us not give those who are still zealously devoting their talents to the same glorious purpose upon earth, sad cause to lament the total inefficacy of their endeavours, — to regret that they are sent to them who will not hear, or who remain as if they had not heard, — to suspect that if we do give them a patient hearing, it is for the sake of their style, their rhetoric, their good taste; but that when their eloquence opposes our corruptions, when their arguments cross our inclinations, when their persuasions trench upon our passions, or their remonstrances interfere with our vanity, we are insensible to the voice of the charmer; or if we forgive their piety for the sake of their talents, we seldom go further than forgiveness.

If the critic of the Bible be a man of false taste, and little piety; one who neglects the Scriptures on pretence of their wanting that splendour of composition which delights him in classic literature; he will find, on examination, that the Bible possesses the noblest elevation of sentiment, and the loftiest grandeur of style, especially in some of the Prophets.

In the epic poets, we are struck with magnificent pictures, with the conquests of heroes, the overthrow of empires, the shock of mighty armies. But how little, how insignificant do these appear in comparison with the effects of the displeasure of the most high GOD even upon inanimate nature! "The earth trembled, the very foundation of the hills shook, because HE was wroth. A consuming fire went out of His mouth. He bowed the heavens, and came down. It was dark under His feet."

Again — Behold the ETERNAL in the splendour of His *pacific* movements! "He rode upon the Cherubim, He came flying on the wings of the wind; at the brightness of His presence the clouds removed."

Mark what bold and beautiful imagery exhibits His *beneficence.* Smiling plenty is a common metaphor with poets: but the metaphors of the royal Prophet give life to things inanimate. "The vallies stand so thick with corn that they laugh and sing." — "The gates and everlasting doors are commanded to lift up their heads;" for what purpose? "that the King of Glory may come in."

Again — See the littleness of human grandeur, the puny efforts of human power! "The heathen make much ado, the kingdoms are moved;" what is to quell the mighty stir? "God hath showed his voice, and the earth shall melt away."

Again — By what strenuous *exertion* is it that the "Infinite God fills all things living with plenteousness?" It is done *without* exertion. It is no *operation* of Almightiness; it is only the simple *result* of it.

Again — "The Almighty WORD leaped down. It *touched* the heavens, but it *stood* upon the earth."

Did the noblest Pagan poets, who possessed all the powers of imagination; who were allowed all the brilliancy of invention; who had all the boundless fields of fancy in which to rove; who were not restrained by truth, — yet, did they ever reach the loftiness of these conceptions of the glorious God of the Christians?

## CHAP. II.

### ON PROVIDENCE.

It is not easy to conceive a more deplorable state of mind, than to live in a disbelief of God's providential government of the world. To be threatened with troubles, and to see no power which can avert them; to be surrounded with sorrows, and discern no hand which can redress them; to labour under oppression or calumny, and believe there is no friend to relieve, and no judge to vindicate us; to live in a world, of which we believe its Ruler has abdicated the throne, or delegated the direction to chance; to suspect that he has made over the triumph to injustice, and the victory to impiety; to suppose that we are abandoned to the casualties of nature, and the domination of wickedness; to behold the earth a scene of disorder, with no superintendent to regulate it; to hear the storms beating, and see the tempests spreading desolation around, with no influence to direct, and no wisdom to control them: all this would render human life a burden intolerable to human feeling. Even a heathen, in one of those glimpses of illumination which they seemed occasionally to catch, could say, *It would not be*

*worth while to live in a world which was not governed by Providence.*

But, as soon as we clearly discern the mind which appoints, and the hand which governs, all events, we begin to see our way through them: as soon as we are brought to recognise God's authority, and to confide in his goodness, we can say to our unruly hearts, what he said to the tempestuous waves, *Peace, be still.* Though all is perplexity, we know who can reduce confusion into order: once assured of the protection of the Supreme Intelligence, we shall possess our souls in patience, and resign our will with submission. As soon as this conviction is fully established, we become persuaded that a being of infinite love would never have placed us in a scene beset with so many trials, and exposed to so many dangers, had he not intended them as necessary materials by which, under his guidance, we are to work out our future happiness; — as so many warnings not to set up our rest here; — as so many incentives to draw us on in pursuit of that better state to which eternal mercy is conducting us through this thorny way.

To keep God habitually in view, as the end of all our aims, and the disposer of all events — to see him in all our comforts, to admire the benignity with which he imparts them — to adore the same substantial, though less obvious mercy, in our afflictions — to acknowledge at

once the unwillingness with which he dispenses our trials, and the necessity of our suffering them — to view him in his bounties of creation, with a love which makes every creature pleasant — to regard him in his providential direction with a confidence which makes every hardship supportable — to observe the subserviency of events to his eternal purposes: all this solves difficulties otherwise insuperable, vindicates the divine conduct, composes the intractable passions, settles the wavering faith, and quickens the too reluctant gratitude.

The fabled charioteer, who usurped his father's empire for a day, is not more illustrative of *their* presumption, who, virtually snatching the reins of government from God, would involve the earth in confusion and ruin, than the denial which the ambitious supplicant received to his mad request, is applicable to the goodness of God in refusing to delegate his power to his creatures: *My son, the very tenderness I show in denying so ruinous a petition, is the surest proof that I am indeed thy father.*

Sounds to which we are accustomed, we fancy have a definite sense. But we often fancy it unjustly; for familiarity alone cannot give meaning to what is in itself unintelligible. Thus many words, without any determinate and precise meaning, pass current in common discourse. Some talk of those chimerical beings, nature, fate, chance, and necessity, as positively as if

they had a real existence, and of Almighty power and direction as if they had none.

In speaking of ordinary events as fortuitous, or as natural, we dispossess Providence of one half of his dominion. We assign to him the credit of great and avowedly supernatural operations, because we know not how else to dispose of them. For instance:—We ascribe to him power and wisdom in the creation of the world, while we talk as if we thought the keeping it in order might be effected by an inferior agency. We sometimes speak as if we assigned the govenment of the world to two distinct beings: whatever is awful only, and out of the common course, we ascribe to God, as revolutions, volcanoes, earthquakes. We think the dial of Ahaz going backward, the sun stationary on Gibeon, marvels worthy of Omnipotence: but when we stop here, is it not virtually saying, that to maintain invariable order, unbroken regularity, perpetual uniformity, and systematic beauty in the heavens and the earth, does not exhibit equally striking proofs of infinite superintendence.

Many seem to ascribe to chance the common circumstances of life, as if they thought it would be an affront to the Almighty to refer them to him; as if it were unbecoming his dignity to order the affairs of beings whom he thought it no derogation of that dignity to create. It looks as if, while we were obliged to him for making

us, we would not wish to encumber him with the care of us. But the gracious Father of the universal family thinks it no dishonour to watch over the concerns, to supply the wants, and dispose the lot of creatures who owe their existence to his power, and their redemption to his mercy. He did not create his rational subjects in order to neglect them, or to turn them over to another, a capricious, an imaginary power.

We do not, it is true, so much arraign his general providence, as his particular appointments. We will allow the world to be nominally his, if he will allow us our opinion in respect to his management of certain parts of it. Now, that he should not put forth the same specific energy individually to direct as to create, is supposing an anomaly in the character of the all-perfect God. Whatever was his design in the formation of the world, and its inhabitants, the same reason would, beyond a doubt, influence him in their superintendence and preservation. David, in describing the simple grandeur of omnipotent benignity, sets us a beautiful pattern. He does not represent the belief of God's providential care as an effort, but describes our continual sustenance as the necessary unlaboured effect of infinite power and goodness. *He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness;* thus making our blessings rather, as it were, a result, than an operation.

And as we are not under the divided control

of a greater and a subordinate power, so neither are we, as the Persian mythology teaches, the subjects of two equal beings, each of whom distributes respectively good and evil according to his peculiar character and province. Nor are we the sport of the conflicting atoms of one school, nor of the fatal necessity of another. There is one omnipotent, omniscient, perfect, supreme Intelligence, who disposes of every person and of every thing according to the counsel of his own infinitely holy will. "The help that is done upon earth, God doth it himself." The comprehensive mind, enlightened by Christian faith, discovers the same harmony and design in the course of human events, as the philosopher perceives in the movements of the material system.

Without a thorough conviction of this most consolatory doctrine, what can we make of the events which are now passing before our eyes? What can we say to the perplexed state of an almost desolated world? There is no way of disentangling the confusion but by seeing God in every thing.—Not to adore his providence as having some grand scheme which he is carrying on, some remote beneficial end in view, some unrevealed design to accomplish, by means not only inscrutable but seemingly contradictory, is practical atheism. To contemplate the events which distract the civilised world, the tyranny which tears up order and morality by the roots;

to behold the calamities of some, the crimes of others — such blackness gathering over the heads of some countries, such tempests bursting over those of others — these scenes must subvert the faith, must extinguish the hope, of all who do not firmly believe that the same power which "stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of the waves," can in his own good time also still *the madness of the people;* will in his appointed season enable us to say, "And where is the fury of the oppressor?" He may, and we know not how soon, enable us to ask, "Where is the man that made the earth to tremble — that did shake kingdoms — that made the world as a wilderness — that destroyed the cities thereof — that opened not the house of his prisoners?" Yes — disorganised as the state of the world appears to be, let us be assured that it is not turned adrift, that things are not left to go on at random. Though the people are rebellious, the Sovereign has not renounced his dominion over them. The most oppressive and destructive agents are his mysterious ministers; they are carrying on, though unconsciously, his universal plan — a plan, which though complicated is consistent; though apparently disorderly will be found finally harmonious.

In some pieces of mechanism we have observed different artists employed in different branches of the same machinery: in this division of labour, each man performs his allotted por-

tion, in utter ignorance, perhaps, not only of the portions assigned to the others, but also of the ultimate application of his own. Busy in executing his single pin, or spring, or wheel, it is no part of his concern to understand the work assigned to others, still less to comprehend the scheme of the master. But though the workman is ignorant how the whole is to be arranged, the machine would have been incomplete without his seemingly inconsiderable contribution. In the mean time the master unites, by apt junctures and articulations, parts which were not known to be susceptible of connection; combines the separate divisions without difficulty, because the several workmen have only been individually helping to accomplish the original plan which had previously existed in his inventive mind.

The prescience of God is among his peculiarly incommunicable attributes. Happy is it for us, indeed, that it *is* incommunicable, for if any portion of it were imparted to us, how inconceivably would the distress of human life be aggravated. But if we allow his omniscience, we cannot doubt his providence. He would not foresee contingencies, for which he could not provide. His attributes are in fact so interwoven that it is impossible to separate them. His omniscience foresees, his understanding, which is infinite, arranges, his sovereignty decrees, his omnipotence executes the purposes of his will. — His wisdom may see

some things to be best for a while to answer certain temporary purposes, which would not be good for a continuance. When the present appointment shall have answered the end to which it was determined, a new one, to which that was preparatory, takes place. The two arrangements may appear to us not to be of a piece, to be even contradictory; while yet this determination and this succession are perfectly consistent in the mind of a Being who sees all all things at once, and "calls things that are not as though they were." God's view of all men and all events throughout all ages, is one clear, distinct, quick, simultaneous view. Infinite knowledge takes in present, past, and future in one comprehensive survey, pierces through all distance at a glance, and collects all ages into the focus of the existing moment.

Once thoroughly grounded and established in this faith and sense of the divine perfections, we shall never look upon any thing to be so monstrous or so minute, so insignificant or so exorbitant, as to be out of the precincts and control of eternal Providence. We shall never reduce, if the allusion may be forgiven, the powers of omnipotence to a level with that of some Indian Rajah who has a territory too unwieldy for his management, or of an Emperor of China who has more subjects than one monarch can govern.

We ask why evil rulers are permitted? —

We answer, though rather mechanically, our own question, by acknowledging that they are the appointed scourges of divine displeasure. Yet God does not delegate his *authority* to the oppressor, though he employs him as his instrument of correction; he still keeps the reins in his own hand. And besides that an offending world stood in need of the chastisement, these black instruments who are thus allowed to ravage the earth, may be, in the scheme of Providence, unintentionally preparing the elements of moral beauty. When divine displeasure has made barren a fruitful land "for the wickedness of them that dwell therein," the ploughshare and the harrow, which are sent to tear up the unproductive soil, know not that they are providing for the hand of the sower, who is following their rude traces in order to scatter the seeds of future riches and fertility.

Or take the conflagration of a town. — They whose houses are burnt are objects of our tenderest commiseration. The scene, if we beheld it, would alike excite our terror and our pity. But, after we have mourned over the devastation, and seen that despair is fruitless, at length necessity impels to industry; — we see a new and fairer order of things arise; the convenience, symmetry, and beauty which spring out of the ashes make us eventually not only cease to regret the deformity and unsightliness to which they have succeeded, but almost recon-

cile us to the calamity which has led to the improvement.

Often have the earthquake, the hurricane, the bolt of heaven, kindling and throwing far and wide its baleful light on this earthly stage, realised in their ultimate effects this image. And we are reminded of a future, general conflagration, "when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth itself shall be burned up," which is to prove only the signal and the preparatory scene for a new heaven and a new earth "wherein dwelleth righteousness." Let us, in every stage leading to this final "restitution of all things," wait with patience for its sure completion. Let us, in the mean time, give credit to the great Author of the book of Fate for the consistency of its catastrophe.

When we peruse the compositions of a human author, we look for unity and consistency in his whole plan; we expect connection and relation between its several parts, and an entireness in the general combination. We are not so much delighted with a fine passage incidentally introduced, a short episode, of which we discern at once the rise and the end, and take in all the incidents and beauties at a single glance, as we are with the judgment which discovers itself in the distribution of the whole work, and the skill, not without difficulty discerned, which arranges, connects, and, as it were, links together the several divisions. Yet

do we not sometimes presume to insinuate as if the great Author of all created nature cannot reduce the complexity of its parts into one consistent whole? Do we not intimate objections as if there were no concert, no agreement in the works of the Almighty mind? Do not the same persons who can speak in raptures of a perfect poem, a perfect scheme of reasoning, a perfect plan in architecture, yet presume to suspect that the concerns of the universe are carried on with less system, and on a more imperfect design, than the rude sketches of a frail creature, who is crushed before the moth?

But if we go so far as to leave God the direction of the natural world, because we know not well, after all, to whom else to commit its management, yet we frequently make little scruple to take the government of the moral world into our own hands. If we consent to his ruling matter, we reluctantly allow that he governs mind. We reason as if we suspected that the passions of men lay beyond his control, and that their vices have overturned his dominion. But we should practically call to mind what is the daily language of our lips, not only that *His* is "the kingdom," but that the "power" is the source, and "the glory" the result of his administration. He does not, it is true, by an arbitrary compulsion of men's minds, rob them of that freedom by which they offend him, nor, by a force on their liberty,

prevent those sins and follies which, if he arbitrarily hindered, he would convert rational beings into mechanical ones; but he turns their sins and follies to such uses, that while, by the voluntary commission of them they are bringing down destruction on their own heads, they are not impeding his purposes.

Nor does Providence, in his wide arrangements, exclude the operation of subordinate causes and motives, but allows them to assist the greater, and thereby to work his will; as subalterns in the battle contribute severally their share to the victory, while, like those inferior causes, they are compelled to keep their ranks, and not to aspire to the command. As we have a higher end, we must have a supreme direction to our aims. Yet a lower end is sometimes made a means to a higher, and assists its object without usurping its place. Some who begin by abstaining from evil, or set about doing good from a principle not entirely pure, are graciously led to the principle by doing or forbearing the action; and are finally landed at the higher point, from beginnings far below those at which *we* might rashly have asserted they could only set out with any hope of success.

Though this may not very frequently occur, yet as it is by means God works, rather than by miracles, and as the world does not overflow with real piety, what a chaos would this earth

become, if God did not permit inferior motives to operate to a certain degree for the general good! Many, whom the utmost stretch of charity cannot induce us to believe that they are acting from the purest principles, are yet contributing to the comfort and good order of society. Though they are sober only from a regard to their health, yet their temperance affords a good example; though they are prudent from no higher motive than the love of money, yet their frugality keeps them within the same bounds as if they were influenced by a better motive; though they may be liberal only to raise their reputation, yet their liberality feeds the hungry; though they are public-spirited merely from ambition, yet their patriotism, by rousing the spirit of the country, saves it. If such right actions, performed from such low motives, can look for no future retribution; — if, being done without reference to the highest end, they do not advance the eternal interests of the doer, nor the glory of God, they are yet his instruments for promoting the good of others, both by utility and example. On this ground we may be thankful that there is so much refinement, generosity, and politeness among the higher orders of society, while we confess that, tear away the action from its motive, sunder the virtue from its legitimate reference, the act and the virtue lose their present character, and their ultimate reward.

The means by which an infinitely wise God often promotes the most important plans, are apt illustrations of the blindness and obliquity of man's judgment. May we be allowed to offer an instance or two, in which human wisdom would probably have taken a course, in the appointment of instruments and events, directly opposite to that pursued by infinite wisdom? What earthly judge, if he had been questioned as to the means likely to produce one of the strongest evidences of the truth of Christianity to unbelievers, but would have named an agreement between Jews and Christians, as its fullest corroboration? If we ourselves had an important cause depending — for instance, the ascertaining our right to a litigated estate; — if the success of the trial depended on the testimony of the witnesses, and on the authenticity of our title-deeds, whose testimony should we endeavour to obtain; into whose hands should we wish our vouchers to be committed? According to all human prudence, should we not desire witnesses who had no known hostility to us; should we not object to a jury of avowed enemies; and should we not refuse to lodge our records in the hands of our opponents?

But His wisdom, in whose sight ours is folly, has seen fit to make one of the most striking proofs of the truth of Christianity depend on the living miracle of the enmity of

the Jews; "to them also were committed the oracles of God," so that to both their ancient testimony and their present opposition we are to look for the most striking proofs of a religion which they behold with perpetual hatred. And now that Christianity is actually made to stand upon such evidence, what test can be more satisfactory? Reason itself owns its validity; for what collusion can now be charged upon the concurrent witnesses to Christianity, when each party in court is decidedly at variance with the other? Who can rationally question the strength of that title which is contained in their genuine archives—that evidence resulting from their hereditary denial of facts, of which they persist to reverence the predictions? Where can we more confidently look for the truth of a religion they detest, than to the verification conferred on it by their original history, their irreversible antipathy, their actual condition, and existing character?

To venture another specimen. If *we* had presumed to point out instruments for the destruction of Jerusalem, we should probably have thought none so appropriate as Constantine; we might have supposed the first Christian emperor would have been the fittest avenger of the Redeemer's blood. Omniscience selected for the awful retribution a Pagan prince, a virtuous one it is true, but one who seemed to have no personal interest in the business,

one to whom Jews and Christians, as such, were alike indifferent. While this utter desolation was the obvious accomplishment of a prophecy, which was to be a lasting evidence of the truth of our religion, the choice of the destroyer was one of those "secret things which belong to God," and is only to be alleged as a proof that "his ways are not our ways."

We will advert to another event, the most important since the incarnation of him whose pure worship it has restored — the Reformation. This occurrence is a peculiarly striking instance of our ignorance of the operations of supreme wisdom, and of the means which, to our short sight, seem fit or unfit for the accomplishment of his purposes. If ever the hand of Providence was conspicuous as the meridian sun, it was so in this mighty work, — it was so in the selection of apparently discordant instruments, — it was so, in overruling the designs of some, to a purpose opposite to their intention, in making the errors of others contribute to the general end. If this grand scheme had been exposed to *our* review for advice, if *we* had been consulted in its formation and its progress, how should we have criticised both the plan and its conductors? How should we have censured some of the agents as inadequate, condemned others as ill chosen, rejected one as unsuited, another as

injurious! One critic would have insisted that the vehemence of Luther would mar any enterprise it might mean to advance; that so impetuous a projector would inevitably obstruct the establishment of a religion of meekness. Another would have pronounced, that among the human faculties, wit was, of all others, the least likely to assist the cause of piety; yet did Erasmus, by his exquisite satires on the ignorance and superstition of the priests, as completely contradict this opinion, as Luther, by his magnanimity and heroic perseverance, triumphantly overturned the other. This inconsiderate, blustering Henry, the human counsellor would have said, will ruin the cause, by uniting his hostility to the reformers with his inconsistent resistance to the papal power; and yet this cause, his very perverseness contributed to promote. Another censor would have been quite certain that the timid policy and cautious feeling of Charles the Wise would infallibly obstruct those measures which they were actually tending to advance. Who among us, if his opinion had been asked, would not have fixed on the Pontiff of Rome and the Emperor of the Turks, as the two last human beings to be selected for promoting the reformed religion? Who would have ventured to assert that the money raised by indulgences, through the profligate venality of Leo, for building St. Peter's in his own metropolis, was actually laying the

foundation of every Protestant church, in Britain — in Europe — in the world? Who could have predicted, that the Imperial Mussulman, in banishing learning from his dominions was preparing, as if by concert, an overwhelming antagonist to the sottish ignorance of the Monks? All these things, separately considered, we, in our captious wisdom, should have pronounced calculated to produce effects directly contrary to the actual result; yet these ingredients, which had no natural affinity, amalgamated by the Almighty hand, were made to accomplish one of the most important works that infinite wisdom, working by human means, has ever effected.

## CHAP. III.

### PRACTICAL USES OF THE DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE.

We do not sufficiently make the doctrine of Providence a practical doctrine.—That the present dark dispensations which afflict the earth are indications of Almighty displeasure few dispute; but having admitted the general fact, who almost does not ascribe the cause of offence to others? How few consider themselves as awfully contributing to draw down the visitation! We look with an exclusive eye to the abandoned and the avowedly profligate, and ascribe the whole weight of the divine indignation to their misdeeds. But we forget that, when a sudden tempest threatened destruction to the ship going to Tarshish, in which there was only Jonah who feared God, those who enquired into the cause of the storm, found *him* to be the very man. The cause of the present desolating storm, as a pious divine observed of that which darkened his day, may as probably be the offences of professing Christians, as the presumptuous sins of the bolder transgressor. This apprehension should set us all on searching our hearts, for we cannot repent of the evil

of which we are not conscious. It should put us upon watching against negligence; it should set us upon distrusting a false security, upon examining into the ground of our confidence. No dependence on the goodness of our spiritual condition, no trust in our exactness in some peculiar duties, no fancied superiority of ourselves to others, no exemption from gross and palpable disorders, should soothe us into a belief that we have no concern in the visitation. Throwing off their own guilt upon others was the second sin of the first offenders.

Another practical use of the doctrine of Providence is, to enable us to maintain a composed frame of spirit under his ordinary dispensations. If we kept up a sense of God's agency in common as well as in extraordinary occurrences — if we were practically persuaded that nothing happens but by divine appointment, it might still those fluctuations of mind, quiet those uncertainties of temper, conquer that unreasonable exaltation or depression, which arise from our not habitually reflecting that all things are determined in number, or weight, or measure, by infinite love. If we acted under the full conviction that He who first set the world in motion governs every creature in it—that we do not take our place upon that stage in space, or that period in time, which we choose, but where and when *He* pleases; that it is He who "ordereth the bounds of our habitation, and fixeth

our lot in life," we should not only contemplate with sober awe the strange events of the age in which we may be living, but cheerfully submit to our individual difficulties, as arising from the same predisposition of causes. Our neglecting to cultivate this train of thought may account for those murmurs which arise in our hearts, both for the public calamities of the world, and the private vexations of life.

If we took God into the account, we should feel that, as rational subjects of his moral government, we are bound to submit to it: we should not indulge discontent and resentment at events which we should then allow were either by his appointment or permission, as we now acknowledge in the more extraordinary cases. But how few are there who think themselves obliged to endure, without repining, the effects of accident, or the provocations of men? And this is because they see only the proximate cause, and do not perceive that God is the grand efficient. In our difficulties, if the sense of his presence were as strongly impressed upon us as the trial is powerfully felt, it would make the heart strong, and render the temptation feeble. Nor would it only strengthen us under temptation, but sustain us under affliction; we should become both humble by correction, and patient under it; we should be grateful in prosperity, without being elated by it. A deep conviction of God's authority over us, and his pro-

perty in us, would also make us kind to others as an acknowledgment that all is his. The very Heathen entertained some sense of his sovereignty; they acknowledged at least their victories to proceed from him, when they dedicated their spoils *to the deliverer.*

If we maintained this constant sense of his providential government, we should be more instant in prayer, we should more fervently supplicate him in our distresses, and more devoutly adore him for his mercies. The recognition of his sovereignty infers the duty of prayer to him, of implicit trust in him, of unqualified submission to him; for the same argument which proves that he should govern, makes it right that we should obey; and the avowal of that obedience is alike consistent with the character of the subject, and the claims of the sovereign. Thus used, there is no consolation to an afflicted world, like that which is derived from the position contained in the proclamation of the imperial penitent of Babylon, "that the most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men;" that he ruleth not by an arbitrary will, but, to borrow the emphatical language of the Apocalypse, by the perfections of THE MIND THAT HATH WISDOM.

But, as we seem virtually to divide the affairs of the world into two portions, we talk as if we did not think certain ordinary trials considerable enough to come from God, nor of course to require that we should meet them with temper.

Under these, therefore, we make ourselves what amends we can for the vexation of trials more severe, by indulging fretfulness, secure of impunity. But let us be assured of these two things, if it be a trial at all, it comes from God; if it disturb our peace, however trivial in itself, it is not small to us, and therefore claims submission.

It is worth our observation that they who are ready to quarrel with Omnipotence for the infliction of pain and suffering, poverty and distress, seldom arraign him for their intellectual or moral deficiencies. Most men are better satisfied with their allotment of capacity than of health; of virtue, than of riches; of skill, than of power. We seldom grudgingly compare our mental endowments with those of others who are obviously more highly gifted, while we are sufficiently forward to repine at their superiority in worldly advantages. Though too sensibly alive to the narrower limits in which our fortune is confined, we do not lament our severer restrictions in the article of personal merit. In the latter instance vanity supports as completely as in the former envy disturbs.

Most of the calamities of human life originate with ourselves. Even sickness, shame, pain, and death, were not originally the infliction of God. But out of many evils, whether sent us by his immediate hand, or brought on us by our

own faults, much eventual good is educed by Him, who, by turning our suffering to our benefit, repairs by grace the evils produced by sin. Without being the author of evil, the bare suggestion of which is blasphemy, he converts it to his own glory, by causing the effects of it to promote our good. If the virtuous suffer from the crimes of the wicked, it is because their imperfect goodness stood in need of chastisement. Even the wicked, who are suffering by their own sins, or the sins of each other, are sometimes brought back to God by mutual injuries, the sense of which awakens them to compunction for their own offences. God makes use of the faults even of good men, to show them their own insufficiency, to abase them in their own eyes, to cure them of vanity and self-dependence. He makes use of their smaller failings, to set them on the watch against great ones; of their imperfections, to put them on their guard against sins; of their faults of inadvertency, to increase their dread of such as are wilful. This superinduced vigilance teaches them to fear all the resemblances, and to shun all the approaches to sin. It is a salutary fear which keeps them from using all the liberty they have; it leads them to avoid, not only whatever is decidedly wrong, but to stop short of what is doubtful, to keep clear of what is suspicious; well knowing the thin partitions which separate danger from destruction.

It teaches them to watch the buddings and germinations of evil, to anticipate the pernicious fruit in the opening blossom.

The weakness and inactivity of our faith expose us to continual distrust. When we ourselves are idle, we are disposed to suspect that the Omnipotent is not at work. That process which we do not see, we are too much inclined to suspect is not going on. From this unhallowed egotism, where we are not the prime movers, we fancy that all stands still. The various parts of the scheme of Providence are sometimes connected by a thread so fine as to elude our dim sight; but, though it may be so attenuated as to be invisible, it is never broken off. The plan is carrying on, and the work, perhaps, about to be accomplished, while we are accusing the Great Artificer, as if he were capable of neglect, or liable to error. But if, after tracing Providence through many a labyrinth, we seem to lose sight of him: if, after having lost our clue, we are tempted to suspect that his operation is suspended, or that his agency has ceased, he is working all the time out of sight — he is proceeding, if the comparison may be allowed, like the fabled Arethusa, whose stream, having disappeared in the place to which it had been followed up, is still making its way under ground; though we are not cured of our incredulity, till we again discover him, bursting forth like the same river, which, having pursued its hidden passage

through every obstruction, rises once more, in all its beauty, in another and an unexpected place.

But even while we are rebelling against his dispensations, we are taking our hints in the economy of public and private life, from the economy of Providence in the administration of the world. We govern our country by laws emulative of those by which he governs his creatures: — we train our children by probationary discipline, as he trains his servants. Penal laws in states, like those of the Divine Legislator, indicate no hatred to those to whom they are proclaimed, for every man is at liberty not to break them; they are enacted in the first instance for admonition rather than chastisement, and serve as much for prevention as punishment. The discipline maintained in all well-ordered families is intended not only to promote their virtue, but their happiness. The intelligent child perceives his father's motive for restraining him, till the act of obedience having induced the habit, and both having broken in his rebellious will, he loves the parent the more for the restraint; on the other hand, the mismanaged and ruined son learns to despise the father, who has given him a licence to which he has discernment enough to perceive he owes the miseries consequent upon his uncurbed appetites.

It is, however, to be lamented, that this great

doctrine of God's universal superintendence is not only madly denied, or inconsistently overlooked by one class of men, but is foolishly perverted, or fanatically abused by another. Without entering upon the wide field of instances, we shall confine our remarks to two that are the most common. First, the fanciful, frivolous, and bold familiarity with which this supreme dictation and government are cited on the most trivial occasions, and adduced in a manner dishonourable to infinite wisdom, and derogatory to supreme goodness. The persons who are guilty of this fault seem not to perceive, that it is not more foolish and presumptuous to deny it altogether than to expect that God's particular providence will interpose, in order to save their exertions, or excuse their industry. For though Providence directs and assists virtuous endeavours, he never, by superseding them, encourages idleness, or justifies presumption.

The highly censurable use to which some others convert this divine agency, is, when not only the pretence of trusting Providence is made the plea for the indolent desertion of their own duty; but an unwarrantable confidence in providential leadings is adopted to excuse their own imprudence. Great is the temerity, when Providence is virtually reproached for the ill success of our affairs, or pleaded as an apology for our own wilfulness, or as a vindication of

our own absurdity in the failure of some foolish plan, or some irrational pursuit. We have no right to depend on a supernatural interposition to help us out of difficulties into which we have been thrown by our misconduct, or under distresses into which we have been plunged by our errors. God, though he knows the prayers which we may offer, and accepts the penitence which we feel, will not use his power to correct our ill-judged labours, any otherwise than by making us smart for their consequences.

The power of God, as it is not an idle, so it is not a solitary prerogative. It, is indeed, an attribute in constant exercise; it is not kept for state, but use; not for display, but exercise; and as it is infinite, one half of the concerns of the universe are not, as we intimated before, suspended, because he is superintending the other half. He is perpetually examining the chronicles of human kind, and inspecting the register of human actions — not like the King in the palace of Shushan *, because "he cannot rest," for Omniscience never slumbers nor sleeps — nor like him to repair the wrongs of one man whose services had remained unrequited, but that, "beholding the evil and the good," no services may go unnoticed and unrecompensed, from the earliest offering of pious Abel, to the latest oblation of faith in the end of time.

This view of things, and it is the view which

* Ahasuerus.—Esther, chap. vi.

the enlightened Christian takes, tends to correct his anger against second causes, and affords him such an assurance that every occurrence will be over-ruled by everlasting love for his eventual good — inspires him with such holy confidence in the promises of the Gospel, that he acquires a repose of spirit, not merely from compelled submission to authority, but from rational acquiescence in goodness. He feels that his confirmed belief in this universal agency is the only thing that can set his heart at rest, still its perturbations, moderate its impatience, soothe its terrors, confirm its faith, preserve its peace, or, when it has suffered a momentary suspension, restore it.

Nor does God exercise his providence alone, either in signal instances of retribution, or in the hidden consolations of the believer; but those secret stings of conscience which goad and lacerate every guilty individual in any criminal pursuit — that lurking discontent which gives the lie to flattery, and mingles the note of discord with the music of acclamation — that unprompted misery of feeling which infuses wormwood into his sweetest pleasures, proceeds from the same providential infliction.

Some men seem to admit a Providence on a scale which expands their ideas, but fancy it an affront to conceive of Him on one which they think contracts them. If they allow that he takes a sweeping view of nations, yet they imply

that it would be too minute an exercise of his superintendence to inspect individuals. The truth is, as we intimated before, men are too much disposed to frame their conceptions of God by the limited powers and capacities of human greatness. They observe, that a king who controls the affairs of a vast empire cannot possibly inspect the concerns of every private family, much less of every single subject. This limited capacity they unconsciously, yet irreverently, transfer to the King of kings. But as no concern is so vast as to encumber Omnipotence, so none is too diminutive to escape the eye of Omniscience. There is no argument for a general, but is also an argument for a particular Providence, unless we can prove that the whole is not made up of parts; that generals are not composed of particulars; that nations are not compounded of families; that societies are not formed of individuals; that chains are not composed of links; that sums are not made up of units; that the interests of a community do not grow out of the well-being of its members. The interests of a particular member, indeed, may sometimes appear to suffer from that which promotes the general good, yet he, by whose law the individual may seem to be injured, has means of remuneration or of comfort which may prevent the sufferer from being ultimately a loser. If, as we are assured upon God's own authority, that our tears are treasured up by him, will not their appropriate consolations be also provided?

Though *He whose footsteps are not known*, may act in some instances in a manner incomprehensible to us, yet if we allow that he acts wisely and holily in cases which we do comprehend, we should give him credit in the obscure and impenetrable cases, for he can no more act contrary to his attributes in the one instance than in the other.

Every intelligent being, therefore, should look up to Divine Providence, not only as engaged in the government and disposal of states, but as exercised for his individual protection, peace, and comfort; — should look habitually to Him who confers favour without claim, and happiness without merit; to Him whose veracity fulfils all the promises which his goodness has made — to Him whose pity commiserates the afflicted, whose bounty supplies the indigent, whose long-suffering bears with the rebellious, whose love absolves the guilty, whose mercy in Christ Jesus accepts the penitent. Such is the fulness of that attribute which we sum up in a single word, *the goodness of God*. It is this goodness which influences his other attributes in our favour — attributes which would else necessarily act against creatures at once sinful and impotent. It makes that wisdom which sees our weakness, strengthen us, and that power which might overwhelm us, act for our preservation. Without this goodness, all his other perfections would be to us as the beauties of his natural creation would be, if the sun were

blotted from the firmament — they might indeed exist, but without this illuminating and cherishing principle, as we should neither have seen nor felt them, so to us they could not be said *to be.*

Some Christians seem to view the Almighty as encircled with no attribute but his sovereignty. God, in establishing his moral government, might indeed have acted *solely* by his sovereignty. He might have pleaded no other reason for our allegiance but his absolute dominion. He might have governed arbitrarily, without explaining the nature of his requisitions: He might have reigned over us as a king, without endearing himself to us as a father. He might have exacted fealty, without the offer of remuneration. Instead of this, while he maintains his entire title to our obedience, he mitigates the austerity of command by the invitations of his kindness, and softens the rigour of authority by the allurement of his promises. In holding out menaces to deter us from disobedience, he balances them with the offered plentitude of our own felicity, and thus, instead of terrifying, attracts us to obedience. If he threatens, it is that by intimidating he may be spared the necessity of punishing; if he promises, it is that we may perceive our happiness to be bound up with our obedience. Thus his goodness invites us to a compliance, which his sovereignty might have demanded on the single ground that it was his due. Whereas he seems almost to wave our

duty as a claim, as if to afford us the merit of a voluntary obedience; though the very will to obey is his gift, he promises to accept it as if it were our own act. He first inspires the desire, and then rewards it. Thus his power, if we may hazard the expression, gives place to his goodness, and he presses us by tenderness almost more than he constrains us by authority. He even condescends to make our happiness no less a motive for our duty than his injunctions; hear his affectionate apostrophe — "Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river!"

It was that his goodness might have the precedency of his omnipotence, that he vouchsafed to give the Law in the shape of a covenant. He stooped to enter into a sort of reciprocal engagement with his creatures — he condescended to stipulate with the work of his hands! But the consummation of his goodness was reserved for his work of Redemption. Here he not only performed the office, but assumed the name of LOVE; a name with which, notwithstanding all his preceding wonders of Providence and Grace, he was never invested till after the completion of this last, greatest act: — an act towards his pardoned rebels, not only of indemnity but promotion; — an act which the angels desire to scrutinise, and which man will never fully comprehend till he enters on that beatitude to which it has introduced him.

## CHAP. IV.

### "THY WILL BE DONE."

To desire to know the Divine will is the first duty of a being so ignorant as man; to endeavour to obey it, is the most indispensable duty of a being at once so corrupt and so dependent. The Holy Scriptures frequently comprise the essence of the Christian temper in some short aphorism, apostrophe, or definition. The essential spirit of the Christian life may be said to be included in this one brief petition of the Christian's prayer, "THY WILL BE DONE;" just as the distinguishing characteristic of the irreligious may be said to consist in following his own will.

There is a haughty spirit which, though it will not complain, does not care to submit. It arrogates to itself the dignity of enduring, without any claim to the meekness of yielding. Its silence is stubbornness, its fortitude is pride; its calmness is apathy without, and discontent within. In such characters it is not so much the will of God which is the rule of conduct, as the scorn of pusillanimity. Not seldom, indeed, the mind puts in a claim for a merit to which the nerves could make out a better title.

Yet the suffering which arises from acute feeling is so far from deducting from the virtue of resignation, that, when it does not impede the sacrifice, it enhances the value. True resignation is the hardest lesson in the whole school of Christ. It is the oftenest taught and the latest learnt. It is not a task which, when once got over in some particular instance, leaves us master of the subject. The necessity of following up the lesson we have begun, presents itself almost every day in some new shape, occurs under some fresh modification. The submission of yesterday does not exonerate us from the resignation of to-day. The principle, indeed, once thoroughly wrought into the soul, gradually reconciles us to the frequent demand for its exercise, and renders every successive call more easy.

We read dissertations on this subject, not only with the most entire concurrence of the judgment, but with the most apparent conviction of the mind. We write essays upon it in the hour of peace and composure, and fancy that what we have discussed with so much ease and self-complacence, in favour of which we offer so many arguments to convince and so many motives to persuade, cannot be very difficult to practise. But to convince the understanding and to correct the will is a very different undertaking; and not less difficult when it comes to our own case than it was in the case

of those for whom we have been so coolly and dogmatically prescribing. It is not till we practically find how slowly our own arguments produce any effect on ourselves that we cease to marvel at their inefficacy on others. The sick physician tastes with disgust the bitterness of the draught, to the swallowing of which he wondered the patient had felt so much repugnance; and the reader is sometimes convinced by the arguments which fail of their effect on the writer, when he is called, not to discuss, but to act, not to reason, but to suffer. The theory is so just and the duty so obvious, that even bad men assent to it; the exercise so trying that the best men find it more easy to commend the rule than to adopt it. But he who has once gotten engraved, not in his memory but in his heart, this divine precept, THY WILL BE DONE, has made a proficiency which will render all subsequent instruction comparatively easy.

Though sacrifices and oblations were offered to God under the law by his own express appointment, yet he peremptorily rejected them by his prophets, when presented as substitutes instead of signs. Will he, under a more perfect dispensation, accept of any observances which are meant to supersede internal dedication — of any offerings unaccompanied by complete desire of acquiescence in his will? "My son, give me thine heart," is his brief but

imperative command. But before we can be brought to comply with the spirit of this requisition, God must enlighten our understanding that our devotion may be rational, he must rectify our will that it may be voluntary, he must purify our heart that it may be spiritual.

Submission is a duty of such high and holy import that it can only be learnt of the Great Teacher. If it could have been acquired by mere moral institution, the wise sayings of the ancient philosophers would have taught it. But their most elevated standard was low; their strongest motives were the brevity of life, the instability of fortune, the dignity of suffering virtue, things within their narrow sphere of judging; things true indeed as far as they go, but a substratum by no means equal to the superstructure to be built on it. It wanted depth, and strength, and solidity for the purposes of support. It wanted the only true basis, the assurance that God orders all things according to the purposes of his will for our final good; it wanted that only sure ground of faith by which the genuine Christian cheerfully submits in entire dependence on the promises of the Gospel.

Nor let us fancy that we are to be languid and inactive recipients of the Divine dispensations. Our own souls must be enlarged, our own views must be ennobled, our own spirit must be dilated. An inoperative acquiescence

is not all that is required of us: — and if we must not slacken our zeal in doing good, so we must not be remiss in opposing evil, on the flimsy ground that God has permitted evil to infest the world. If it be his will to permit sin, it is an opposition to his will when we do not labour to counteract it. This surrender, therefore, of our will to that of God, takes in a large sweep of actual duties, as well as the whole compass of passive obedience. It involves doing as well as suffering, activity as well as acquiescence, zeal as well as forbearance. Yet the concise petition daily slips off the tongue without our reflecting on the weight of the obligation we are imposing on ourselves. We do not consider the extent and consequences of the prayer we are offering, the sacrifices, the trials, the privations it may involve, and the large indefinite obedience to all the known and unknown purposes of infinite wisdom to which we are pledging ourselves.

There is no case in which we more shelter ourselves in generalities. Verbal sacrifices cost little, cost nothing. The familiar habit of repeating the petition almost tempts us to fancy that the duty is as easy as the request is short. We are ready to think that a prayer rounded off in four monosyllables can scarcely involve duties co-extensive with our whole course of being; that, in uttering them, we renounce all right in ourselves, that we acknowledge the universal, indefeasible title of *the blessed and*

*only Potentate*; that we make over to Him the right to do in us, and with us, and by us, whatever he sees good for ourselves, whatever will promote his glory, though by means sometimes as incomprehensible to our understanding, as unacceptable to our will, because we neither know the motive, nor perceive the end. These simple words express an act of faith the most sublime, an act of allegiance the most unqualified; and, while they make a declaration of entire submission to a Sovereign the most absolute, they are, at the same time, a recognition of love to a Father the most beneficent.

We must remember, that in offering this prayer, we may, by our own request, be offering to resign what we most dread to lose, to give up what is dear to us as our own soul; we may be calling on our heavenly Father to withhold what we are most anxiously labouring to attain, and to withdraw what we are most sedulously endeavouring to keep. We are solemnly renouncing our property in ourselves, we are distinctly making ourselves over again to Him whose we already are. We specifically entreat him to do with us what he pleases, to mould us to a conformity to his image, without which we shall never be resigned to his will: in short, to dispose of us as his infinite wisdom sees best, however contrary to the scheme which our blindness has laid down as the path to unquestionable happiness.

To render this trying petition easy to us, is one great reason why God, by such a variety of providences, afflicts and brings us low. He knows that we want incentives to humility, even more than incitements to virtuous actions. He shews us in many ways, that self-sufficiency and happiness are incompatible; that pride and peace are irreconcilable; that, following our own way, and doing our own will, which we conceive to be of the very essence of felicity, is in direct opposition to it.

"Christianity," says Bishop Horsley, "involve many paradoxes, but no contradictions." To be able to say with entire surrender of the heart, "Thy will be done," is the true liberty of the children of God, that liberty with which Christ has made them free. It is a liberty, not which delivers us from restraint, but which, freeing us from our subjection to the senses, makes us find no pleasure but in order, no safety but in the obedience of an intelligent being to his rightful Lord. In delivering us from the heavy bondage of sin, it transfers us to the "easy yoke of Christ," from the galling slavery of the world to the "light burden" of him who overcame it.

This liberty, in giving a true direction to the affections, gives them amplitude as well as elevation. The more unconstrained the will becomes, the more it fixes on one object; once fixed on the highest, it does not use its liberty for

versatility, but for constancy; not for change, but fidelity; not for wavering, but adherence.

It is, therefore, no less our interest, than our duty, to keep the mind in an habitual posture of submission. "Adam," says Dr. Hammond, "after his expulsion, was a greater slave in the wilderness than he had been in the inclosure." If the barbarian ambassador came expressly to the Romans to negotiate from his country for permission to be their servants, declaring, that a voluntary submission, even to a foreign power, was preferable to a wild and disorderly freedom, well may the Christian triumph in the peace and security to be attained by a complete subjugation to Him who is emphatically called *the God of order.*

A vital faith manifests itself in vital acts. "Thy will be done," is eminently a practical petition. The first indication of the gaoler's change of heart was a practical indication. He did not ask, "Are there few that be saved?" but, "What shall *I* do to be saved?" The first symptom St. Paul gave of his conversion, was a practical symptom: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He entered on his new course with a total renunciation of his own will. It seemed to this great Apostle, to be the turning point between infidelity and piety, whether he should follow his own will, or the will of God. He did not amuse his curiosity with speculative questions. His own immediate and grand con-

cern engrossed his whole soul. Nor was his question a mere hasty effusion, an interrogative springing out of that mixed feeling of awe and wonder which accompanied his first overwhelming convictions. It became the abiding principle which governed his future life, which made him in labours more abundant. Every successive act of duty, every future sacrifice of ease, sprung from it, was influenced by it. His own will, his ardent, inpetuous, fiery will, was not merely subdued, it was extinguished. His powerful mind, indeed, lost none of its energy, but his proud heart relinquished all its independence.

We allow and adopt the term *devotion* as an indispensable part of religion, because it is supposed to be limited to the act; but *devotedness*, from which it is derived, does not meet with such ready acceptation, because this is a habit, and a habit involves more than an act; it pledges us to consistency, it implies fixedness of character, a general confirmed state of mind, a giving up what we are, and have, and do, to God. Devotedness does not consist in the length of our prayers, nor in the number of our good works, for, though these are the surest evidences of piety, they are not its essence. Devotedness consists in doing and suffering, bearing and forbearing in the way which God prescribes. The most inconsiderable duty performed with alacrity, if it oppose our own inclination; the most ordinary trial met with a right

spirit, is more acceptable to him than a greater effort of our own devising. We do not commend a servant for his activity, if ever so fervently exercised, in doing whatever gratifies his own fancy: we do not consider his performance as obedience, unless his activity has been exercised in doing what we required of him. Now, how can we insist on his doing what contradicts his own humour, while we allow ourselves to feel repugnance in serving our heavenly Master, when his commands do not exactly fall in with our own inclination?

We must also give God leave, not only to take his own way, but his own time. The appointment of seasons, as well as of events, is his. "He waits to be gracious." If he delays, it is because we are not yet brought to that state which fits us for the grant of our request. It is not he who must be brought about, but we ourselves. Or, perhaps, he refuses the thing we ask, in order to give us a better. We implore success in an undertaking, instead of which, he gives us content under the disappointment. We ask for the removal of pain; he gives us patience under it. We desire deliverance from our enemies; he sees that we have not yet turned their enmity to our improvement, and he will bring us to a better temper by further exercise. We desire him to avert some impending trial, instead of averting it, he take away its bitterness; he mitigates what we believed would be intoler-

able, by giving us a right temper under it. How, then, can we say he has failed of his promise, if he gives something more truly valuable than we had requested at his hands?

Some virtues are more called out in one condition of life, and some in another. The exercise of certain qualities has its time and place; but an endeavour after conformity to the image of God, which is best attained by submission to his will, is of perpetual obligation. If he does not require all virtues under all circumstances, there is no state or condition, in which he does not require that to which our church perpetually calls us, "an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart." We may have no time, no capacity, no special call for deeds of notorious usefulness; but whatever be our pursuits, engagements, or abilities, it will trench on no time, require no specific call, interfere with no duty, to subdue our perverse will. Though the most severe of all duties, it infringes on no other, but will be the more effectually fulfilled by the very difficulties attending on other pursuits and engagements.

We are so fond of having our own will, that it is astonishing we do not oftener employ it for our own good; for our inward peace is augmented in exact proportion as our repugnance to the Divine will diminishes. Were the conquest over the one complete, the enjoyment of the other would be perfect. But the Holy

Spirit does not assume his emphatical title, the COMFORTER, till his previous offices have operated on the heart, till he has "reproved us of sin, of righteousness, of judgment."

God makes use of methods inconceivable to us, to bring us to the submission which we are more ready to request with our lips, than to desire with our hearts. By an imperceptible operation, he is ever at work for our good; he promotes it by objects the most unpromising, by events the most unlikely. He employs means to our shallow views the most improbable to effect his own gracious purposes. In every thing he evinces that his thoughts are not as our thoughts. He overrules the opposition of our enemies, the defection of our friends, the faults of our children — the loss of our fortune as well as the disappointments attending its possession — the unsatisfactoriness of pleasures as well as the privation — the contradiction of our desires — the failure of plans which we thought we had concerted, not only with good judgment but pure intentions. He make us sensible of our faults by the mischiefs they bring upon us; and acknowledge our blindness, by extracting from it consequences diametrically opposite to those which our actions were intended to produce.

Our love to God is stamped with the same imperfection with all our other graces. If we love him at all, it is as it were traditionally,

hereditarily, professionally; it is a love of form and not of feeling, of education and not of sentiment, of sense and not of faith. It is at best a submission to authority, and not an effusion of voluntary gratitude, a conviction of the understanding, and not a cordiality of the affections. We rather assume we have this grace than actually possess it, we rather take it for granted on unexamined grounds, than cherish it as a principle from which whatever good we have must proceed, and from which, if it does not proceed, the principal does not exist.

Surely, say the oppugners of Divine Providence, in considering the calamities inflicted on good men, if God loved virtue, he would not oppress the virtuous. Surely Omnipotence may find a way to make his children good, without making them miserable. — But have these casuists ever devised a means by which men may be made good without being made humble, or happy without being made holy, or holy without trials? Unapt scholars indeed we are in learning the lessons taught! But the Teacher is not the less perfect because of the imbecility of his children.

If it be the design of Infinite Goodness to disengage us from the world, to detach us from ourselves, and to purify us to himself, the purification by sufferings seems the most obvious method. The same effect could not be any otherwise produced, except by miracles, and

God is an economist of his means in grace as well as in nature. He deals out all his gifts by measure. His operation in both is progressive. Successive events operate in one case as time and age in the other. As suns and showers so gradually mature the fruits of the earth, that the growth is rather perpetual than perceptible, so God commonly carries on the work of renovation in the heart silently and slowly, by means suitable and simple, though to us imperceptible, and sometimes unintelligible. Were the plans more obvious, and the process ostensible, there would be no room left for the operations of faith, no call for the exercise of patience, no demand for the grace of humility. The road to perfection is tedious and suffering, steep and rugged: our impatience would leap over all the intervening space which keeps us from it, rather than climb it by slow and painful steps. We would fain be spared the sorrow and shame of our own errors, of all their vexatious obstructions, all their dishonourable impediments. We would be completely good and happy at once without passing through the stages and gradations which lead to goodness and happiness. We require an instantaneous transformation which would cost us nothing; the spirit of God works by a gradual process which costs us much. We would combine his favour with our self-indulgence; we would be spared the trials he has appointed without losing

the felicity he has promised. We complain of the severity of the operation, but the operation would not be so severe if the disease did not lie so deep.

Besides, the afflictions which God appoints are not seldom sent to save us from those we should bring on ourselves, and which might have added guilt to misery. He threatens, but it is that he may finally save. If "punishment is his strange," it is also his necessary "work." Even in the sorest affliction, the loss of those we love, there may be a mercy impenetrable to us. God has, perhaps, laid up for us in heaven that friend whom we might have lost in eternity, had he been restored to our prayers here. — But if the affliction be not improved, it is, indeed, unspeakably heavy. If the loss of our friend does not help to detach us from the world, we have the calamity without the indemnification; we are deprived of our treasure without any advantage to ourselves. If the loss of him we loved does not make us more earnest to secure our salvation, we may lose at once our friend and our soul. To endure the penalty and lose the profit, is to be emphatically miserable.

Sufferings are the only relics of the true cross, and when Divine grace turns them to our spiritual good, they almost perform the miracles which blind superstition ascribes to the false one. God mercifully takes from us

what we have not courage to offer him; but if, when he resumes it, he sanctifies the loss, let us not repine. It was his while it was ours. He was the proprietor while we were the possessors.

Though we profess a general readiness to submit to the Divine will, there is nothing in which we are more liable to illusion. Self-love is a subtle casuist. We invent distinctions. We too critically discriminate between afflictions which proceed more immediately from God, and disappointments which come from the world. To the former we acknowledge, in words at least, our willingness to submit. In the latter, though equally his dispensation, we seem to feel justified in refusing to acquiesce. God does not desire us to inflict punishments on ourselves, he only expects us to bear with patience those he inflicts on us, whether they come more immediately from himself or through the medium of his creatures.

Love being the root of obedience, it is no test of that obedience if we obey God only in things which do not cross our inclinations, while we disobey him in things that are repugnant to them. Not to obey except when it costs us nothing is rather to please ourselves than God, for it is evident we should disobey him in these also if the allurement were equally powerful in these cases as in the others. We may, indeed, plead, in apology, that the command we resist is

of less importance than that with which we comply; but this is a false excuse, for the authority which enjoins the least, is the same with that which commands the greatest; and it is the authority to which we are to submit, as much as to the command.

There is a passage in St. Luke which does not seem to be always brought to bear on this point as fully as it ought: "Unless a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." This does not seem to be quite identical with the command in another place, that "a man should sell all that he has," &c. When the Christian world, indeed, was in its infancy, the literal requisition in both cases was absolutely necessary. But it appears to be a more liberal interpretation of the command, as "forsaking" all that we have, extends to a full and entire consecration of ourselves to God, a dedication without reserve, not of fortune only, but of every desire, every faculty, every inclination, every talent; a resignation of the whole will, a surrender of the whole soul. It is this surrender which alone sanctifies our best actions. It is this pure oblation, this offering of unshared affection, this unmaimed sacrifice, which is alone acceptable to God, through *that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction*, made for the sins of the whole world. Our money he will not accept without our good will, our devotions without our affec-

tions, our services without our hearts. Like the prevaricating pair, whose duplicity was punished by instant death, whatever we keep back will annihilate the value of what we bring. It will be nothing if it be not all.*

* Acts, chap. v.

## CHAP. V.

### ON PARABLE.

It is obvious, that the reason why mankind, in general, are so much delighted with allegory and metaphor, is, because they are so proportioned to our senses, those first inlets of ideas. Ideas gained by the senses quickly pass into the region of the imagination; and from thence, more particularly the illiterate and uninformed, fetch materials for the employment of their reason.

Little reaches the understanding of the mass but through this medium. Their minds are not fitted for the reception of abstract truth. Dry argumentative instruction, therefore, is not proportioned to their capacity; the faculty by which a right conclusion is drawn, is, in them, the most defective; they rather feel strongly than judge accurately; and their feelings are awakened by the impression made on their senses.

The connection of these remarks with the subject of instruction by parable, is obvious. It is the nature of parable to open the doctrine which it professes to conceal. By engaging attention and exciting curiosity, it developes

truth with more effect than by a more explicit exposition. By laying hold on the imagination, parable insinuates itself into the affections, and, by the intercommunication of the faculties, the understanding is made to apprehend the truth which was proposed to the fancy.

There is commonly found sufficient rectitude of judgment in the generality to decide fairly on any point within their reach of mind, if the decision neither opposes their interest nor interferes with their prejudice. If you can separate the truth from any personal concern of their own, their verdict will probably be just; but if their views are clouded by passion, or biassed by selfishness, that man must possess a more than ordinary degree of integrity who decides against himself and in favour of what is right.

In the admirably devised parable of Nathan, David's eager condemnation of the unsuspected offender is a striking instance of the delusion of sin and the blindness of self-love. He who had lived a whole year in the unrepented commission of one of the blackest crimes of the decalogue, and who, to secure to himself the object for which he had committed it, perpetrated another almost more heinous, and that with an hypocrisy foreign to his character, could in an instant denounce death on the imaginary offender for a fault comparatively trifling. The vehemence of his resentment even over-

stepped the limits of his natural justice, in decreeing a punishment disproportioned to the crime, while he remained dead to his own deep delinquency. A pointed parable instantly surprised him into the most bitter self-reproach. A direct accusation might have inflamed him before he was thus prepared; and, in the one case, he might have punished the accuser, by whom, in the other, he was brought to the deepest self-abasement. The prudent prophet did not rashly reproach the King with the crime he wished him to condemn, but placed the fault at such a distance, and in such a proper point of view, that he first procured his impartial judgment, and afterwards his self-condemnation. An important lesson, not only to the offender, but to the reprover.

He "who knew what was in man," and who intended his religion, not for a few critics to argue upon, but for a whole world to act upon, frequently adopted the mode of instruction by allegory. Though he sometimes condescended to unveil the hidden sense, by disclosing the moral meaning in some short, but most significant comment, yet he usually left the application to those whom he meant to benefit by the doctrine. The truth which spoke strongly to their prejudices, by the veil in which it was wrapped, spared the shame while it conveyed the instruction, and they probably found a gratification in the ingenuity of their own solution

which contributed to reconcile them to the sharpness of the reproof.

The most unjust and prejudiced of the Jews were, by this wise management, frequently drawn in to give an unconscious testimony against themselves; this was especially the case in the instance of the householder and his servants. Had the truth they were led to deduce from this parable been presented in the offensive form of a direct charge, it would have fired them with inexpressible indignation.

Christians who abound in zeal, but are defective in knowledge and prudence, would do well to remember that *discretion* made a remarkable, though not disproportionate part of the Redeemer's character; he never invited attack by imprudence, or provoked hostility by intemperate rashness. When argument was not listened to, when persuasion was of no avail, when even all his miracles of mercy were misrepresented, and his divine beneficence thrown away, so that all farther attempts to do good were unavailing, *he withdrew to another place;* there, indeed, to experience the same malignity, there to exercise the same compassion.

The divine Author of our religion gave also the example of teaching, not only by parable, but by simple propositions, detached truths, pointed interrogations, positive injunctions, and independent prohibitions, rather than by elabo-

rate and continuous dissertation. He instructed, not only by consecutive arguments, but by invitations, and dissuasives adapted to the feelings, and intelligible to the apprehensions of his audience. He drew their attention by popular allusions, delighted it by vivid representations, and fixed it by reference to actual events. He alluded to the Galileans, crushed by the falling tower, which they remembered — to local scenery — the vines of Gethsemane, which they beheld, while he was descanting respectively upon repentance, and upon himself, as the "true vine." By these simple, but powerful and suitable methods, he brought their daily habits, and every-day ideas, to run in the same channel with their principles and their duties, and made every object with which they were surrounded contribute its contingent to their instruction.

The lower ranks, who most earnestly sought access to his person, could form a tolerably exact judgment on the things he taught, by the aptness of his allusions to what they saw, and felt, and heard. The humble situation he assumed, also, prevented their being intimidated by power, or influenced by authority. It at once made their attendance a voluntary act, and their assent an unbiassed conviction. The questions proposed with a simple desire of instruction, were answered with condescending kindness; those dictated by curiosity or craft

were repelled with wisdom, or answered, not by gratifying importunity, but by grafting on the reply some higher instruction than the enquirer had either proposed or desired. Where a direct answer would, by exciting prejudice, have impeded usefulness, he evaded the particular question by enforcing from it some general truth. On the application of the man whose brother had refused to divide the inheritance with him — in declining to interfere judicially, he gave a great moral lecture of universal use against avarice, while he prudently avoided the subject of the particular litigation.

His answer to the entangling question, "And who is my neighbour?" suggested the instructive illustration of the duty to a neighbour, in that brief, but highly finished apologue of the good Samaritan. The Jews, who would never have owned that a Samaritan was their neighbour, were, by this pious management, drawn in to acknowledge, that every man, without regard to country, who was even of a hostile country, if he needed their assistance, was their neighbour. In this slight outline, three characters are sketched with so much spirit and distinctness, that, as Mr. Boyle says of Scripture truths in general, they resemble those portraits, whose eyes every one who enters the room fancies are fixed on him.

False zeal, which he generally found associated with pride and hypocrisy, was almost the

only vice which extorted from him unmitigated severity: if he sometimes corrected presumption and repelled malicious inquisitiveness, he uniformly encouraged distress to approach, and penitence to address him. The most indirect of his instructions inculcated or encouraged goodness. The most simple of his reasonings were irrefragable without the formality of syllogism; and his brief, but powerful persuasions went straight to the heart, which the most elaborate discussions might have left unmoved. Every hearer, however illiterate, would at once seize his meaning, except those who found themselves interested in not understanding it; every spectator, "if they believed not him, would believe his works," if pride had not blinded their eyes, if prejudice had not barred up their hearts.

Thus, if in the Gospels, the great doctrines of religion are not always conveyed in a didactive form, or linked with logical arrangement, some important truth meets us at every turn, is held out in some brief sentence; some hint is dropped that may awaken, recall, quicken, or revive perpetual attention. The same spirit pervades every part; we are reminded without being fatigued; and, whatever is the point to be pressed, some informing, alarming, or consoling doctrine is extracted from it, or grows out of it.

The Scriptures, however, are so far from

setting aside the use of reason, that all their precepts are addressed to it. If they are delivered in a popular manner, and often in independent maxims, our reason, by combining them, methodises the detached passages into a perfect system; so that by a combination, which it is in the power of every intelligent reader to make, a complete rule of practice is collected. The scattered precepts are embodied in examples, illustrated by figures, and exemplified by parables. These always suppose the mind of the hearer to be possessed of a certain degree of common knowledge, without which the proposed instruction would be unintelligible. For, if the Gospel does not address its disciples as if they were philosophers or mathematicians, it always supposes them to possess plain sense and ordinary information; to have acquaintance with human, if not with elevated life. The allusions and imagery with which it abounds would have been superfluous, if the hearers had not been previously acquainted with the objects and circumstances to which the image is referred, from which the parallel is drawn, to which the allusion is made.

Our heavenly Father, in his offers of illumination, does not expect we should open our mental eyes to this superinduced light, without opening our understandings to natural and rational information, but expects that we should apply the faculties bestowed to the objects

proposed to them. We put ourselves, therefore, in the fairest way of obtaining his assistance, when we most diligently use all the means and materials he has given us; comparing together his works and his word; not setting up our understanding against his revelation, but, with deep humility, applying the one to enable us to comprehend the other; not extinguishing our faculties, but our pride; not laying our understanding asleep, but casting it at the foot of the cross. We have dwelt on this point the more, from having observed, that some religious persons are apt to speak with contempt of great natural endowments as if they were not the gift of God, but of some inferior power: the prudently pious, on the other hand, while they use them to the end for which they were conferred, keep them in due subordination, and restrict them to their proper office. Abilities are the gift of God, and next to his grace, though with an immense interval, his best gift; but are never so truly estimable as when they are dedicated to promote his glory.

Our heavenly Instructor, still more to accommodate his parables to the capacities of his audience, adopted the broad line of instruction conveyed under a few strong features of general parallel, a few leading points of obvious coincidence, without attending to petty exactnesses, or stooping to trivial niceties of correspondence. We are not, therefore, to hunt after minute

resemblances, nor to cavil at slight discrepancies. We should rather imitate his example, by confining our illustration to the more important circumstances of likeness, instead of raising such as are insignificant into undue distinction. This critical elaboration, this amplifying mode, which ramifies a general idea into all the minutiæ of parallel, would only serve to divert the attention, and split it into so many divisions, that the main object would be lost sight of.

The author once heard a sermon which had for its text, "Ye are the salt of the earth." The preacher, a really good man, but wanting this discretion, not contented with a simple application of the figure, instead of a general allusion to the powerfully penetrating and correcting nature of this mineral, instead of observing that salt was used in all the ancient sacrifices, indulged himself in a wide range, chemical and culinary, of all the properties of salt, devoting a separate head to each quality. A long discussion on its antiseptic properties, its solution and neutralisation, led to rather a luxurious exhibition of the relishes it communicates to various viands. On the whole, the discourse seemed better adapted for an audience composed of the authors of the Pharmacopœia, or a society of cooks, than for a plain untechnical congregation.

But to return. — Who can reflect without

admiration on the engaging variety with which the great Teacher labours to impress every important truth? Whenever different aspects of the same doctrine were likely still more forcibly to seize the attention, still more deeply to touch the heart, still more powerfully to awaken the conscience, he does not content himself with a single allegory. In his awful exhibition of the inestimable value of an immortal soul, he does not coolly describe the repentance of a single sinner as viewed with complacency by the highest order of created intelligences, but as adding "joy" to bliss already perfected in immortality. He does not limit his instruction to one metaphorical illustration of the delight of the heavenly hosts, but extends it to three, finishing the climax by that most endearing and touching of all moral and allegorical pictures, the restoration of the prodigal to his father's love.

But this triple use of the same species of allegory — each instance rising above the other, in beauty and in force, each adding fresh weight to one momentous point — he most emphatically employs in the last discourse previous to his final suffering; we mean in his sublime illustration of the solemnities of the last day, in three successive parables all tending to impress the same awful truth.

As he well knew every accessible point of the human heart, so there was none which he did

not touch. But the grand circumstance which carried his instruction so directly home to the hearts and consciences of men, was, that he not only taught, but "did all things well." His doctrines were so digested into his life, his instructions so melted into his practice, that it rendered *goodness* visible as well as perfect; and these analogies and resemblances were not only admirably, but uniformly correspondent. He did not content himself like those heathen philosophers, to whose affable conduct in society that of the blessed Redeemer has lately been so impiously compared, (though their motives differed, as much as the desire of converting sinners differs from delighting in them,) with exhibiting systems without morals, and a rule without a pattern, but the purity and perfection of his divine character gave light to knowledge, and life to document.

## CHAP. VI.

### ON THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS.

OUR Lord's parables had been sometimes indicative of existing circumstances; sometimes predictive of events which related to futurity. After having, in his preceding allegories, by practical lessons, encouraged the prepared, and exhorted the unprepared to look for the kingdom of God, he closed his parabolical * instructions by an awful exhibition of their fitness or unfitness for that everlasting kingdom; in which he unfolds what their condition will be, when all mystery, all instruction, all preparation, shall be at an end; when every act of every being shall be laid as bare before the eyes of the whole assembled world, as it was seen in its commission by HIS, from whom nothing is hid. The last of these three prophetic scenes is indeed not so much a parable as a picture; not so much an allegory as a literal representation: the solemn reality rises above all figure, and could never have been so forcibly conveyed as by this plain, yet most sublime, delineation.

* See Matthew, chap. XXV.

The conclusion immediately to be drawn from the second of these parables, the parable of the Talents, is, that we have nothing that is properly our own, nothing that is underived from God. Every talent is a deposit placed in our hands, not for our exclusive benefit, but for the good of others. Whatever we possess which may either be improved to God's glory, or perverted to his dishonour, comes within the description of a talent. To use any of our possessions, therefore, as if we had an independent right to the disposal of them, is to usurp the prerogative of the Giver. Many, it is to be feared, will wait till that great disclosing day which will throw a blaze of light on all motives, as well as all actions, before they will be convinced of the fallacy of that popular maxim, that a man may do what he will with his own. He has indeed a full right to his proprietorship with respect to other men, but, with respect to God, he will find he had no exclusive property. Whatever portion of his possessions conscience ought to have turned over from vanity to charity, from sensuality to piety, he may find, too late, was not his own, but his who gave it him for other purposes.

God proportions his requisitions to his gifts. The one is regulated by the measure of the other. As duties and obligations are peculiar and personal, we are not to trench on the sphere of others. It is of our own talent we

must render our own account. A capacity, however, to know our duty, and to love and serve God, as they are indiscriminately bestowed, so the enquiry into the use made of them will be universal, while the reward or punishment will be individually assigned.

Deficiency and excess are the Scylla and Charybdis between which we seldom steer safely. If our talents are splendid, we are subject to err on the side of display; if mean, totally to suppress their exercise, apologising for our indolence by our insignificance; but mediocrity of talents is as insufficient an excuse for sloth, as superior genius is for vanity. The true way would be to exercise the brightest faculties with humility, and the most inconsiderable with fidelity. The faithful and highly gifted servants in the parable, it is apparent, were so far from being lifted into pride, or seduced into negligence, by the greater importance of the trust committed to them, that they considered the largeness of their agency as an augmentation of their responsibility. *They* did the will of their lord without conditioning or debating. Their slothful associate, instead of doing it, contented himself with arguing about it. He who disputed much, had done nothing: he should have known that Christianity is not a matter of debate, but of obedience.

There is no one doctrine of Holy Scripture either insignificant or merely theoretical.

That which the parable teaches is highly and specifically practical. The instruction to be deduced from it is as extensive as the gifts of God to his creatures, as the obligations of man to his benefactor. It is more especially practical, as it designates this world to be a scene of business, action, exertion, diligence. It inculcates the high and complicated duty, of laying out ourselves for the glory of our Maker, and the exercise of an implicit obedience to his will. God has not given us the command to work, without furnishing us with instruments with which to labour, and suitable materials to work upon. Our talents, such as *riches*, *power*, *influence*, *wisdom*, *learning*, *time*, are those instruments. The wants, helplessness, and ignorance of mankind, are the objects to which these instruments are to be applied. These talents are bestowed in various proportions, as to their value, as well as in different degrees, as to the quantity and number. He who is favoured with more abundant endowment, should mix with his gratitude for the gift an abiding sense of his own greater accountableness. He who is slenderly furnished, should never plead that the inferiority of his trust is an excuse for his negligence. The conviction that the Great Master will not exact beyond the proportion of his gift, though an encouragement to those whom his providence has placed in a narrow sphere of usefulness, is no discharge from their diligence.

Is it reasonable, that he who has less to do, should therefore do nothing? When little is expected from us, not to do that little enhances the crime; and it aggravates the ingratitude, when we convert our master's more moderate demands into a pretence for absolute supineness.

He who is not called upon to relieve the necessities, or to enlighten the ignorance of others, has still a weighty work upon his hands: he has the care of his own soul. If he is deficient in learning, and natural abilities — if he has little credit, and less fortune, he probably has time; he certainly has the means of religious improvement: so that, in this land of light and knowledge, especially now that universal instruction is happily become a national care, there is hardly such a thing as innocent ignorance. Even of the lowest, of the least, a strict account will be required. To plead ignorance where they might have been taught, indolence because they had little to do, and negligence because not much was expected, is only treasuring up innumerable reasons for aggravating their condemnation.

It is remarkable that of the several characters exhibited in the parable, the least endowed was the only one punished, his neglect being every way inexcusable. A lasting and awful lesson, that no inferiority can claim exemption from the general law of duty. If the right employment of the gift is an encouragement to the poorly en-

dowed, as being easily exercised and amply rewarded, its abuse is an awakening call to every one. For, is it not fairly deducible from this instance, that if of those whose scale in society is low, whose intellectual powers are mean, or whose fortunes are narrow; if even of such, a strict account will be required, if even in these, mere deficiency was so harshly reprobated, mere nullity was so severely punished,—a sentence of most tremendous import must await those who employ rank and opulence to selfish and corrupt ends, or genius to pernicious purposes; the one debasing their own minds by sensuality, or corrupting others by examples of vice and prodigality; the other, devoting abilities so great, with profligacy so notorious, as to appear little less than "archangel ruined," and drawing inferior spirits into the destruction in which they have plunged themselves?

But again:—if these several talents, individually conferred, when employed to wrong purposes, or not employed at all, will be rigorously punished; what sentence have they to expect, in whom is centered the splendid confluence of God's gifts? What will be the eternal anathema pronounced on those who possessed aggregately talents, with every one of which, singly enjoyed, they might have rendered the world about them better and happier? To reflect by whom they were bestowed, to what end designed, how they have been used, and what a reckoning

awaits them, forms a combination of reflections too awful to be dwelt upon. From the anticipation of such complicated woe we turn with terror. The bare idea of a punishment which shall always torment, and never destroy, is insupportable. Yet how many believe this without being influenced by the belief! How many, by an unaccountable delusion, refuse to conform their lives to the injunctions of the Gospel, while they put their vices under the protection of its promises!

The parable informs us, that it was "after a long time," that the Lord required the account; so long, that the wicked think it will never come, and even the good are apt to persuade themselves that it will not come soon. Let not those, however, who are sitting at ease in their possessions, whether of nature or of fortune, to speak after the manner of men, fancy that the reckoning which is delayed is forgotten. The more protracted the account, the larger will be the sum-total, and, of course, the more severe the requisition. All delay, indeed, is an act of mercy; but mercy neglected, or abused, will enhance punishment in proportion as it aggravates guilt.

It is obvious that the servants in the parable had been in the habit of attending to their mercies. They seem never to have been unmindful of the exact value of what had been committed to them; "Lord, thou deliveredst

unto me five talents." If we do not frequently enumerate the mercies of God to us, we shall be in danger of losing sight of the Giver, while we are revelling in the gift; of neglecting the application, and forgetting the responsibility. We should recollect, that his very employment of us is a high mark of favour; the use he condescends to make of us augments our debt, and whenever he puts it in our way to serve him, he lays on us a fresh obligation, and confers on us an honourable distinction.

Though he that has most, and does most, has but "a few things," yet his remuneration shall be immense. It is his fidelity, and not his success; his zeal in improving occasions, and not the number or greatness of the occasions, that will be rewarded. There will be an always infinite disproportion between the work he has done, and the blessing attending it.

The expostulation of the unprofitable servant presents an awful lesson against distrust in God, and fallacious views of his infinitely perfect character. The very motive this false reasoner produces in his own vindication, is the strongest argument against him. If he "*knew*" that his lord was such a rigorous exactor, that was the very reason why he should not have given in such a negative account. "I knew thou wast a hard master." Could a weightier argument have been advanced for a directly different conduct? Common prudence might have

taught him that, with such a master, his only security was assiduous industry. The want of love of God was at the root of this, as it is of all sin.

How many listen to the sentence of this unworthy servant! How many allow the equity of his exclusion, and yet how few, comparatively, ask, with the agitated Apostles, "Lord, is it I?" This simple question, honestly put, and practically followed up, would render all comment vain, all exhortation superfluous. This self-application is the great end of the parable, the great end of Scripture, the great end of preaching, and the only end of hearing.

But do not too many of us, like him we are so ready to condemn, conceal our self-love under the assumption of modesty, and indulge our sloth under the humble pretence that we have no talent to exercise? But let us be assured it is the deadness of our spiritual affections, and not our mean opinion of ourselves, that is the real cause. The service of God is irksome, because his commands interfere with our self-indulgence. Let the lowly Christian, possessed of but his single talent, cheer his fainting heart by that beautifully condescending plea, with which the compassionate Saviour vindicated the modest penitent, who had no other way of demonstrating her affection but by pouring perfumes on his feet — SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD. A tenderness of en-

couragement, which, if we considered by whom it was uttered, and to whom addressed, must convey consolation to the heart of the most poorly endowed and self-abasing Christian.

In giving in the final account of the use we have made of our talents, we shall not only have to reckon for the Christian knowledge we really acquired, for the progress we actually made in piety, for the good impressions we received or communicated, but for the higher degrees of all which we might have received or imparted, had we, instead of squandering our talents on inferior objects, carried them to the height of which they were susceptible. Had we acted up to our convictions, had we pushed our advantages to their possibilities, had we regularly pursued what we eagerly engaged in, had our progress kept pace with our resolutions, our attainments with our opportunities, how much more profitable servants we might have been! But satisfied to stop short of great offences, we neglect to impress upon our consciences how large a portion of our reckoning will be of a negative character.

From natural feeling, from inward consciousness, from the notices of reason, the traces of hereditary opinion, and the analogy of things, independently of Revelation, we cannot avoid the belief that we are accountable beings. Our notions of right and wrong, of equity and judgment, our insuppressible forebodings, our fear-



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ful anticipations, the suggestions of natural conscience, all unite their several forces to fasten on the mind the belief that we shall be called to a definite account. Our intelligent nature, our rational powers, our voluntary agency, make us suitable subjects of God's moral government. His wisdom, power, omniscience, rectitude, and justice, render him supremely fit to be our final judge, and the dispenser of our eternal awards. But God, in his infinite goodness, has not, in this most important point, left us to the bare light of unassisted nature; he has not left us to be tossed about without rudder, or compass, on the boundless ocean of harassing conjecture. He has not abandoned us to the alternation of vain fears and unfounded hopes; to the sickly suggestions of a troubled fancy, the cruel uncertainties of doubt, and the cheerless darkness of ignorance. The expectation of a day of retribution is not the gloomy reverie of the superstitious, nor the wild vision of the enthusiastic. *He who cannot lie* has solemnly assured us, that he has appointed a day in which He will judge the world by that Man whom He has sent, Christ Jesus.

The coming of this great day which nature suspected, and reason allowed, Scripture confirms. It will at length arrive. The scrutiny so graphically exhibited by our Lord will be realised in all its pomp of terrors. The sea

shall give up its dead, and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them, and every man shall be judged according to his works. And the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the judgment shall be set, and the books opened, and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.

This universal examination into the human character, this critical dissection of the heart of man, from the first created being to him who shall be caught up alive in the air at Christ's second coming, shall infallibly take place. Blessed be Almighty forbearance, it is still in the power of every existing child of Adam to lighten to himself his apprehensions of that day. He may do more; he may convert terror into transport, by acting now as if he really believed it would one day come; by acting as he shall then wish he had acted. If "the terrors of the Lord persuade men," what effect should his mercy produce; that mercy which has given the universal warning to the whole human race in three consentaneous parables, exhibited with a spirit of truth more resembling historic narrative than prophetic anticipation! There is not one living being who now reads this page from whom that day is distant; to some it must be very near; to none, perhaps, nearer, than to her who now tremblingly presumes to raise the warning voice; — to her, to all, it is tremend-

ously awful. Let none of us, then, content ourselves with a barren admiration of its solemnities, as if it were an affecting scene of a tragedy, invented to move the passions without rectifying them; to inspire terror, without quickening repentance. Let us not be struck by it as with a wonderful fact in history, which involves the interest of some one country with which we have no particular concern; or of some remote century disconnected with that in which our lot is cast. It is the personal, the individual, the everlasting concern of every rational being through all the rolls of time, till time shall be no more. It is the final, unalterable decision on the fate of every intelligent, and, therefore, every accountable creature, to whom God has revealed his will, to whom he has sent his Son, to whom he has offered the aid of his Spirit.

No wonder that the universal administration of final justice shall be manifested in the most awful pomp and splendour — no wonder that it will be equally a scene of anguish and of transport; when it will, on the one hand, as much exceed the terrors of guilt, as it will, on the other, transcend the hopes of faith — when the eternal Son of the eternal Father, in the full brightness of his glory, shall be the judge; when the whole assembled universe shall be the subjects of judgment — when not only the deeds of every life, but the thoughts of every

heart, shall be brought to light — when, if *we* produce our works, the recording book will produce our motives — when every saint who acted as seeing Him who is invisible, shall not only see but share the glory in which he trusted; when the hypocrite shall behold him whom he believed without trusting, and mocked without deceiving; when the profligate shall witness the reality of what he feared, and the infidel shall feel the certainty of what he denied.

## CHAP. VII.

### ON INFLUENCE, CONSIDERED AS A TALENT.

It is at best but a selfish sort of satisfaction, though the poet calls it a delightful one, *to see others tossed about in a storm, while we are sitting in security, rejoicing, not because they are in danger, but because we are safe.* Christianity instructs us to improve on the sentiment. It teaches us to extract not only comfort and gratification from the comparison of our happier lot with that of the less favoured; but in making the comparison, it reminds us to make it with reference to God, by emphatically asking, "Who is it that maketh us to differ?"

But if we look around, not only on the external but on the moral and mental distinctions among mankind, and consider the ignorance, the miseries, and the vices of others, as a ground for our more abundant gratitude; what sort of feeling will be excited in certain persons by a sight and sense of those miseries, those vices, and that ignorance, of which their own influence, or example, or neglect, has been the cause? If we see any unhappy whom we might have relieved, any ignorant whom we ought to have instructed, any corrupt whose

corruptions we never endeavoured to reform, but whom, perhaps, we have contributed to make what they are; in either of these cases, it is difficult to conceive any state of mind less susceptible of comfort, any circumstance more calculated to excite compunction. These instances may help men to a pretty just criterion by which to judge of their own character, since it is certain *they* never felt any true gratitude for their own mercies, who can look with indifference on either the temporal or spiritual distresses of others. And if no one ever truly mourned for his own sins who can be insensible to the sins of those around him, so no one can be earnest to promote his own salvation, who neglects any fair opening of contributing to the salvation of others.

What an appalling reflection it is, that at the tremendous bar, a being already overwhelmed with the weight of his own offences, may have to sustain the addition of the amazing and unexpected load of all those, of which he has been the cause in others! What an awful contrast will be presented to the assembled universe, when certain commanding characters shall stand forth, burdened not only with their personal guilt, nor even with the sins of their immediate connections, but in a certain measure with the sins of their age and country; while others, who devoted similar talents and influence to opposite purposes, shall appear gloriously surrounded

with happy spirits, of whose felicity they have been the instruments; their shining crowns made brighter by imparted brightness, by goodness which flourished under their auspices, by virtues which were the effect of their patronage, by piety which was the fruit of their example.

Influence is a talent not only of undefinable but of universal extent. Who is there so insignificant as not to have his own circle, greater or smaller, made better or worse by his society, his conduct, his counsels? That presumptuous but common consolation of a dying bed, *I have done no harm to any one*, is always the fallacious refuge of such as have done little or no good. Man is no such neutral being.

It is not the design of the present considerations to insist so much on the more striking and conspicuous instances of misemployed influence (for the ordinary state of life does not incessantly call them into action), as on those overlooked, though not unimportant demands for its exertion, which occur in the every-day transactions of mankind, more especially among the opulent and the powerful.

Rank and fortune confer an influence the most commanding. All objects attract the more notice from being placed on an eminence, and do not excite the less attention, because they may deserve less admiration. In anticipating the scrutiny that will hereafter be made into the

manner in which the rich and great have employed their influence, that powerful engine put into their hands for the noblest purposes, may we not venture to wish they had some disinterested friend, less anxious to please than to serve them, who would honestly, as occasion might offer, interrogate them in a manner something like the following: —

"Allow me, as a friend to your immortal interests, to ask you a few plain questions. Has your power been uniformly employed in discouraging injustice, in promoting particular as well as general good; in countenancing religious as well as charitable institutions; in protecting the pious, as well as in assisting the indigent? Has your influence been conscientiously exerted in vindicating injured merit; has it been employed in defending insulted worth against the insolence of the unfeeling, the scorn of the unworthy, the neglect of the unthinking? Has it been exercised in patronising modest genius, which would, without your fostering hand, have sunk in obscurity?

"Have you, in the recommendations which have been required of you, had an eye to the suitableness of the candidate for the place, rather than to a provision for an unworthy applicant, to the injury of the office? And have you honestly preferred the imperative claims of the institution to the solicitations, or even to the wants, of the individual? Have you never

loaded a public, or injured a private, establishment, by appointing an unfit agent, because he was a burden on your own hands, or a charge on your own purse? Have you never promoted a servant who had 'wasted your goods,' and with whom you parted for that very reason, to the superintendence of a charity, or to the management of an office, where you knew he would have a wider sphere, and a more uncontrouled power, of purloining public property, or wasting private bounty, than in that from which your prudence had discharged him?"

To rise a step higher: — "Have you never, if intrusted with a patronage over that peculiarly sacred office, 'which any one may well tremble to give or to receive,' been governed by a spirit of nepotism in the disposal of it, which you perhaps severely censure under a certain other establishment most obviously corrupt? Have you never been engaged in promoting men, who, from their destitution of principle, are a dishonour to the profession in which you have been raising them, or, by the want of abilities, are disqualified for it? Have you never connived at the preferment of the weak or the wicked, to the exclusion of others whose virtues and talents eminently fitted them for the situation? Or, have you, rather, strenuously laboured to fix the meritorious in the place they were so qualified to fill, while you supplied the wants of the undeserving or incompetent

relative out of your own purse? And have you habitually made a conscience of recommending adequate persons in preference to the unworthy and the unfit, though the latter belonged to your own little senate, or swelled your own large train?

"Have you habitually borne in mind that important, but disregarded, maxim, that what you do by another is done by yourself; and not only carefully avoided oppression in your own person, but, rising superior to that selfish indolence, the bane, the grave of every nobler quality, have you been careful that your agents do not exercise a tyranny which you yourself abhor, but which may be carried on under your name? Your ignorance of such injustice will be of little avail, if, through supineness, you have sanctioned abuses which vigilance might have prevented, or exertion punished.

"Have you unkindly denied access to your presence to the diffident solicitor, who has no other channel to preferment but your favour; and if not able to serve him, have you softened your refusal by feelingly participating in his disappointment, instead of aggravating it by refusing to see and soothe him, when you could do no more? Have you considered that, to listen to wearisome applications and pertinaceous claims, is among the drawbacks of comfort necessarily appended to your station? To examine into interfering pretensions, while

it is a duty you owe to the applicant, is a salutary exercise of patience to yourself; it is also the only certain means you possess of distinguishing the meritorious from the importunate."

We dwell on this part of the subject the more earnestly, because it is to be feared that even the tender-hearted and the benevolent, from the facility of a yielding temper, from weariness of importunity, from a wish to spare their own feelings, as well as from a too natural desire to get rid of trouble, are frequently induced to confer and to refuse favours, not only against their principles and their judgment, but against their will. Yet as no virtue is ever possessed in perfection by him who is destitute of its opposite,—Have you been equally careful, never, for the sake of popularity or the love of ease, to awaken false hopes, and keep alive false expectations in your retainers, though you knew you had no prospect of ever making them good?—thus committing your own honour for the sake of swelling the catalogue of your dependents; and, by insincerity and indecision, feeding them with delusive promises, when a firm negative, by extinguishing hope, might have put them on a more successful pursuit.

Some striking instances of delicate liberality, recorded of a late lamented statesman, have shown, that it is not too much to expect from human nature, that a man should exert his influence for the benefit of another, even though

it were to his own disadvantage, and that he should be not only willing, but desirous, not to procure for himself the gratitude of the obliged person, nor to obtain his admiration; but would be contented, that, while he himself afforded all the benefit, an intervening agent should have all the credit. This disinterestedness is among the nicer criteria of a Christian spirit.

While we can with truth assign the most liberal praise to that spirit of charity which pre-eminently distinguishes the present period, we are compelled to lament that justice is not held in equal estimation by some of those who give the law to manners. This considerably diminishes their influence, because it is the quality which, of all others, they most severely require in their dependents, as being that which is most immediately connected with their own interest. And how far from equitable is it, to blame and punish the statutable offence in petty men, whose breach of integrity is unhappily facilitated by continual opportunity, or induced by the pressure of want, while the rigorous exacter of justice is as defective in the practice, as he is strict in the requisition?

The species of injustice alluded to, consists much in that laxity of principle which admits of a scale of expense disproportioned to the fortune; this creates the inevitable necessity of remaining in heavy arrears to those who can ill afford to give long credit: in return, it induces in the

creditor the habit, and almost the necessity, of enhancing the price of his commodity. The evil would be little, if the encroachment were only felt by those whose tardy payment renders exorbitance almost pardonable: but others, who practise the most exact justice, are involved in the penalty, without partaking in the offence; and the correct are taxed for the improbity of the dilatory. This dilapidating habit leads to an indolence in inspecting accounts; and the increasing unwillingness to examine into debts, increases the inability to discharge them; for debts, like sins, become more burdensome in proportion as people neglect to enquire into them. Perhaps there is no instance of misconduct which tends more directly to diminish influence than the imprudence of contracting debts, and the irregularity and consequent injustice of which it is sometimes unintentionally the cause.

And here, if we might be allowed a remark somewhat foreign to our immediate subject, it may be observed, that the low conception of justice of which we complain has infected not only morals, but religion; or rather, what began in our principle towards God, extends to our practice towards man. It is the attribute of which we make the least scruple to rob the Almighty; for it is a fashionable, though covert, mode of arraigning his justice, when we affect to exalt his character by representing him as too merciful to punish. Justice is not only emi-

nently conspicuous in her own central station, but gives life and light to other attributes. By cutting off superfluous expenses, temperance and sobriety grow out of justice; and, what is subtracted from luxury, is carried over, without additional expense, to the account of beneficence.

The Holy Scriptures lay down some precise and indispensable rules for the practice of justice, while they leave great latitude, at least as to the selection of its individual acts, to charity. Justice can be maintained only by this distinct demand and rigid acquiescence, while charity would loose the nature and quality of benevolence, if it were under any such express and definite rules. Charity may choose her objects, but those of justice are chosen for her. It was, doubtless, in mercy, that no absolute rule or limitation is made respecting charity, that we might have the gratification of a voluntary delight in its exercise, for our nature is, in this respect, so kindly constituted, that, in minds not peculiarly ill formed, the call to beneficence is the call to enjoyment.

But to return.—The influence of the great, "the observed of all observers," descends into the social walks of life. The pinnacle on which they stand, makes their most trivial actions, and even words, objects of attention and imitation to those beneath them. The consciousness of this should be an additional motive for avoiding, in

their ordinary conversation, not only what is corrupt, but whatever savours of levity and imprudence; the vanity of the little world is ready, not from mischief, but self-importance, to convert the thoughtless slips of the great into consequence; their most frivolous remarks are quoted, merely that the quoter may seize the only occasion he could ever find of showing that he has been admitted to their company. This harmless little stratagem holds out a strong motive for those whose condition in life makes them subjects of observation, occasionally to let fall something that may be remembered, not merely because they said it, but because it was worth saying. This remark applies to superiority of talents, to be considered in our next head, still more than of rank.

As the great and noble are sufficiently disposed to look with reverted eye back to their ancestral honours, it were to be wished that they were all as ready, as we are happy to say some of them are, to cast the same careful retrospect to the ancient usages of their illustrious houses. There was a time when family-devotion was considered as a kind of natural appendage to high rank, when domestic worship was almost as inseparably connected with the aristocracy, as the church with the state. The chapel was as much a part of the splendid establishment as the state-room. When the form of piety was thus kept up, the reality was more likely to

exist. Even the appearance was an homage to religion, the very custom was an honourable recognition of Christianity. But, in the way of influence, it must have been of high importance; the domestics would have their sense of duty kept alive, and would with more alacrity serve those who they saw served God. It was a bond of political as well as of moral union; it was the only occasion on which "the rich and poor met together." There is something of a coalescing property in social worship. In acknowledging their common dependence on their common Master, this equality of half an hour would be likely to promote subordination through the rest of the day. Take it in an inferior point of view, it was a useful discipline, it was a family muster-roll, a sort of domestic parade, which regularly brought the privates before their commanding officers, and maintained order as well as detected absence. It was also calculated to promote the interests of the superiors, by periodically reminding their dependents of their duty to God, which necessarily involves every human obligation.

We come now to speak, though cursorily, of another deposit of talent, not less extensive in its immediate effects, and far more important in its consequences; the influence of Genius and Learning. As the influence of well-directed talents is too obvious to require animadversion,

we shall confine our brief remarks to their contrary direction. If we could suppose the man whose talents had, by pernicious principles, been diverted from their right channel, to have, at the close of life, that clear view of his own character, and the misapplication of his mental powers, which will be presented to him when he opens his eyes on eternity, we should witness as complete a contrast with his present feelings as any two opposite descriptions of character could exhibit.

Of all the various sentences to be awarded at the dread tribunal, can imagination figure one more severe than will be pronounced against the polluted and polluting wit; the noblest faculties turned into arms against him who gave them, the eloquence which would scarcely have disparaged the tongue of angels, converted to the rhetoric of hell?

The mischief of a corrupt book is indefinite, both in extent and duration. When the personal example of the writer has done its worst, and has only ruined his friends and neighbours, the operation of an unprincipled work may be but just beginning. It is a sin, the commission of which carries in it more of the character of its infernal inspirer than any other. It is a crime not prompted by appetite, kindled by passion, or provoked by temptation: but a gratuitous, voluntary, cold-blooded enormity, the offspring of intellectual wickedness, the child of spiritual

depravity; the deepest sin without the slightest excuse. Sins of surprise have infirmity to plead, but, in this frigid villany, the badness of the motive keeps pace with the turpitude of the act. The *intention* is to offend God, the *project* is to ruin man; the *aim* is to poison the temporal peace, the *design* is to murder the everlasting hope of all who come in contact with it.

But the exclusive application of talents to subjects perfectly unexceptionable, and right and valuable, as far as they go, is sometimes an occasion in which we might mingle regret with admiration. We view with reverence the profound scholar, a man, so far from having lost any time in trifling, whose very amusements are labours, and whose relaxation is intensity of thought, and sedulity of study. By unremitting diligence, he has been daily adding fresh stores to his ponderous mass of erudition, or periodically presenting new tomes to the literary world, in return for those he has rifled. But, put the case, that such a man has never so much as conceived the thought of lending to religion his weight of character, or the influence of his reputation, by devoting some little fragment of time to a moral or religious speculation; has never once entertained the idea of occasionally directing his treasures of learning into any channel which leads to the country where he and his volumes together, the durable register of his life, are soon about to land, — Who can for-

bear, in the contemplation of such a possible character, regretting that his too moderate ambition should be satisfied with the applause of an age or an island, without once exercising his talents on some topic which might have included the concerns of his whole species, which might have embraced the interests of both worlds? Who can forbear lamenting, that he has risen so high without reflecting that, in a moral sense, "one step higher would set him highest;" that he should have been contented with the idolatrous worship of some Pagan sage as editor or annotator; and, for that humble meed, to relinquish the duty of glorifying his Maker, by instructing his fellow-creatures; as if that were a less splendid object, an inferior concern to be turned over to inferior abilities, and to which inferior abilities were adequate?

If the awful apprehension of a future account could, at the close of life, lead even the illustrious Grotius, who had with equal ability cultivated both secular and sacred studies, to wish that he could change characters with a poor pious peasant, who used to spend most of his time in reading the Bible at his gate, what may finally be the wish of those who, having quitted a far less useful life without any such contrite confession, are brought to *witness* at once the retribution assigned to the conscientious use of one solitary talent, and to *feel* that awarded to their own vast but abused allot-

ment? That awakening parable of the Divine Teacher which presents so terrible a view of the "great gulf" which irrevocably separated two other neighbours, whose respective lots in worldly circumstances resembled the distinctions of intellect in the preceding instance — that "gulf" which eternally divided the holy beggar from the opulent sensualist — is equally applicable to the present case. If any thing could deepen or widen a barrier already hopelessly impassable, might it not be the substitution of ill-applied abilities for misemployed riches? *

An affecting thought involuntarily forces itself upon us, on the departure of distinguished genius. All those shining talents which had hitherto too exclusively filled our minds, sink at once in our estimation, because we know they are now nothing to their possessor but as they were used, worse than nothing if they were not used wisely. In the court were he now stands for trial, neither the cogent argument nor the pointed wit can secure his acquittal; happy if they appear not strong evidences against it. The qualities of his heart, which perhaps, dazzled by those of his head, we had not taken into the account — his errors having been lost in his brightness — now come forward as the others recede. Our feelings are solely

* Let no one apply this to the great statesman of Holland above mentioned.

occupied with what may be now available to him to whom we have owed pleasure or information. That fame which we lately thought so solid a good, seems now a painted cloud melting into air — that proud FOR EVER for which he wrote, seems dwindled to a point — that visionary immortality which we had assigned as his meed, compared with the eternity on which he has entered, is become less than the shadow to the substance, less than the halo to the sun.

This idea strikes the mind with peculiar force, upon the recent decease of two writers of uncommon reach of thought, profound research, and unbounded philological learning. Had these two eminent men been possessed of inferior minds, or a more dubious fame, their death would have sounded the signal of silence, no less to the moralist than to the satirist, as to the gross sensuality and corrupt principles of the one, the avowed infidelity and profligate political doctrines of the other. As it is, we cannot but refer to them, though with feelings of pungent regret, and only under a strong sense of the atonement which such examples owe to the world for the mischief they do it, as a melancholy illustration of some of the preceding remarks. It is to be feared that the unmixed commendation of their talents and erudition, without the gentlest censure of their principles and practices, with which some of our journals abounded on the loss of these able

but unhappy men, might tend to impress the ardent youthful student with an over-valuation of genius, unsanctified by Christian principles, of erudition undignified by virtuous conduct.

Far, very far, from my heart be the ungenerous thought of treating departed eminence with disrespect, but in analysing striking characters, is it not a duty to separate "the precious from the vile," lest unqualified admiration, where there is such large room for censure, should, while profusely embalming the dead, allure the ingenuous living to an imitation as unlimited as the panegyric was undistinguishing?*

* To prevent any mistaken application of these remarks, it may be proper to avow that Professor Porson and Mr. Horne Tooke are the persons to whom they allude.

## CHAP. VIII.

### ON TIME, CONSIDERED AS A TALENT.

If we already begin to feel what a large portion of life we have improvidently squandered — what days and nights have been suffered to waste themselves, if not criminally, yet inconsiderately; if not loaded with evil, yet destitute of good — how much time has been consumed in worthless employments, frivolous amusements, listless indolence, idle reading, and vain imaginations — if things already begin to appear wrong, which we once thought at least harmless, though not perhaps useful — what appearance will they assume in that inevitable hour when all things will be seen in their true light, and appreciated according to their intrinsic value? We shall then feel in its full force how often we neglected what we knew to be our duty, shunned what we were aware was our interest, and declined what we yet believed would add to our happiness; while, with perverted energy, we eagerly pursued what we had reason to think was contrary to our interest, duty, and happiness. But excuses satisfy us now, to which we shall not then give the hearing for a moment. The thin disguise

which the illusion of the senses now casts over vanity, sloth, and error, will then be as little efficient as consolatory.

We are always ready to complain of the *gay* world; but may we not venture to wish that the *religious* world also had not its faults? They may be called specks, but specks upon ermine sully its purity. Do not the prevailing errors of some religious professors appear by the want of self-denial, and the misapplication of time? Is not this precious talent too much devoted to music, dress, trifling visits, and light reading? And does not this devotedness bring the two classes nearer to each other than they would willingly be thought? There is this difference; we expect it from the one, it is a part of their system; it is a complete departure from that of the other.

He who carefully governs his mind will conscientiously regulate his time. To him who thus accurately distributes it, who appropriates the hour to its due employment, life will never seem tedious, yet counted by this moral arithmetic it will be really long. If we compute our time as critically as our other possessions; if we assign its proportions to its duties, though the divisions will then be so fully occupied that they will never drag, yet the aggregate sum will be found sufficiently long for all the purposes to which life is destined.

It is not a little absurd that they who most

wish to abolish time would be the least willing to abridge life. But is it not unreasonable to endeavour to annihilate the parcels of which life is composed, and at the same time to have a dread of shrinking the stock? They who most pathetically lament the want of time, are either persons who plunge themselves into unnecessary concerns, or those who manage them ill, or those who do nothing. The first create the deficiency they deplore; the second do not so much want time as arrangement; the last, like brute animals laden with gold, groan under the weight of a treasure of which they make no use, and do not know the value.

They will never make a right use of time who turn it over to chance, who live without any definite scheme for its employment, or any fixed object for its end. Such desultory beings will be carried away by every trifle that strikes the senses, or any whim that seizes the imagination. They who live without any ultimate point in view, can have no regular process in the steps which lead to it.

But though in order to prevent confusion, to animate torpor, and to tame irregularity, it is always a duty to form a plan, occasions will arise when it may be a higher duty to break it. Both ourselves and our plans must ever be kept subject to the will of a higher power. That is an ill-regulated mind which wears life away without any settled scheme of action; that is a

little mind which makes itself a slave to any preconceived rule, when a more imperative duty may arise to demand its infraction. Providence may call us to some work during the day which we did not foresee in the morning. Even a good design must be relinquished to make way for a better, nor must we sacrifice a useful to a favourite object, nor must we scruple to renounce our inclinations at the call of duty or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful doer as well as a "cheerful giver."

In our use of time we frequently practise a delusion which cheats us of no inconsiderable portion of its actual enjoyment. The *now* escapes us while we are settling future points not only of business, of ease, or of pleasure, but of benevolence, of generosity, of piety. These imaginary points to which we impatiently stretch forward in idea, we fix at successive but distant intervals, endeavouring by the rapid march of a hurrying imagination to annihilate the intervening spaces. One great evil of reckoning too absolutely on marked periods which may never arrive, is, that by this absorption of the mind, we neglect present duties in the anticipation of events not only remote but uncertain. Even if the anticipated period does arrive, it is not always applied to the purpose to which it was pledged; and the event which was to feel the full weight of our interference and commanding influence, when it has taken place, sinks into

the undistinguished mass of time and circumstances. The point which we once thought, if it ever could be attained, would supply abundant matter, not only for present duty or pleasure, but for delightful retrospection, loses itself, as we mingle with it, in the common heap of forgotten things; and as we recede from it, merges in the dim obscure of faded recollections. Having arrived at the era, instead of seizing on that *present* so impatiently desired while it was *future*, we again send our imaginations out to fresh distances in search of fresh deceits. While we are pushing it on to objects still more remote, the large uncalculated spaces of comfort and peace, or of languor and discontent, which fill the chasm, and which we scarcely think worth taking into the account, make up far the greater part of life.

All this would be only foolish, and would hardly deserve a harsher name, if these large uncultivated wastes, these barren interstices, these neglected subdivisions, had not all of them imperious demands of their own — if they were not to be as rigorously accounted for, as the vivid spots and shining prospects which promise so much and produce so little.

Let us not then compute time by particular periods or signal events. Let us not content ourselves with putting our festal days only into the calendar, but remember that from the hour when reason begins to operate, to the hour

in which it shall be extinguished, every particle of time is valuable: that no day can be insignificant, when every day is to be accounted for; that each one possesses weight and importance, because of each the retribution is to be received. In the prospect therefore of our coming time, let us not make great leaps from the expectation to the occurrence; but bearing in mind that small concerns make up the larger share of life, let us aim to execute well those which lie more immediately before us. For the instant occasion we have life and time in hand, for that which is prospective, we may no longer be in possession of either: and it is an argument of no small cogency, that he who devotes time to its best purposes, secures eternity for its best enjoyments.

But we are guilty of the strange inconsistency of being most prodigal of what we best love, and of throwing away what we most fear to lose, that time of which life is made up. If God does not give us a short time, we can contrive to make it short by this wretched husbandry. It is not so much indigence of time as prodigality in the waste of it, that prevents life from answering all the ends for which it is given. Few things make us so independent of the world as the prudent disposition of this precious article. It delivers people from hanging on the charity of others to emancipate them from the slavery of their own company. We

should not only be careful not to waste our own time, but that others do not rob us of it. The distinction of crime between "stealing our purse" and "stealing our good name" has been beautifully contrasted. That the purse is "trash" is a sentiment echoed by many who yet set no small value on the trash so liberally condemned; while the waster of his own, or the pilferer of another's time, escapes a censure which he ought more heavily to incur. It is a felony for which no repentance can make restitution, the commodity being not only invaluable but irrecoverable.

Considerable evil, with respect to the economy of time, arises from an error which infects some minds of a superior cast — a notion that contempt of order and custom are indications of genius, that great minds cannot be tied to times, nor enslaved by seasons. They value themselves on being systematic only in their disdain of method, on being regular in nothing but irregularity; with them accident gives the law to action. They pride themselves not in despatching business but postponing it, and this in order to show with what ability they can retrieve time to which they are always in arrears. From this vanity of intimating that they can execute in hours what costs slower souls days or weeks, the most pressing business is deferred to some indefinite period, and duties thus postponed are not seldom omitted.

The same confidence in his own powers which leads a young man of genius to believe he can catch knowledge by intuition, see every thing at a glance, and comprehend every thing in a moment, tempts him to put off that moment. But if such wonders are really to be achieved without the old ingredients time and study, what might he not expect would be accomplished with their assistance? Those who are now marvels would then be miracles! The too common consequence of this impatience of application is to affect to despise whatever knowledge requires time to attain, and to consider whatever demands industry to acquire as not worth acquiring.

Nor is this error monopolised by talents. We have known some, who, having no other evidence of genius to produce, never failed to be unpunctual. It is a wonder that the more intellectual, seeing their province thus invaded by dunces, do not become regular through mere contempt of their imitators, and abandon the abuse of time to those who know not how to spend it wisely.

Christianity is a social principle. He who has discovered the use of time, and consequently the value of eternity, cannot but be solicitous for the spiritual good of his fellow-creatures. The one, indeed, is indicative of the other. But this good, like every other, is not without its dangers. We cannot essentially benefit people

without associating with them, without rendering ourselves agreeable to them. But in so doing we should ever recollect that we may seek to please till we forget to serve them, we may soften strong truths to render them more palatable, till we come gradually less to recommend *them* than ourselves. In the spirit of friendly accommodation we may insensibly lower the standard of religion, with a view to make ourselves more agreeable, and may deceive in order to conciliate.

Or we may fall into another error. We may begin at the wrong end. We may censure the wrong practice without any reference to the principle, or we may suit our counsels, not to the wants, but to the taste, of our friend. In our endeavours to promote the good of others, we should be careful to find out the points in which they are most deficient. If their error be ignorance of Scripture, if worldliness, if prejudice, if a general disinclination to seriousness, if a blind respect for religion, joined to an unacquaintedness with its doctrines; in each case, a very different mode of conduct will be requisite. In each, in all, we should, indeed, with the utmost fairness, lay open the whole scheme of Christianity, neither concealing its difficulties, its humbling requisitions, nor the self-denials it imposes. But, at the same time, if we suspect any one truth to be particularly revolting to them, it will be more prudent to approach this

truth gradually through others, from which they are less averse, than, by forcing its introduction at the outset, shut up the way to farther progress. Every doctrine should be unfolded gradually, judiciously, temperately, not insisting on any points that are not clearly scriptural, nor on any that admit of doubtful disputation, nor on many points at a time; and, above all, on none unseasonably, or unceasingly.

This habit of turning time to account, by endeavouring to be useful to others, will, if conducted with mildness, and exercised with Christian humility, be eminently beneficial to ourselves. It will set us on a closer examination of the truths we suggest; and, in contending with blindness and self-sufficiency, we shall find a wholesome exercise for our own patience and moderation. It may remind us, that we were once, perhaps, in the same state. Above all, it will put us on a more strict watchfulness over our own hearts and lives, lest we should be adopting one set of principles for our conversation, and another for our conduct. It will induce the necessity of a more exact consistency, as they, to whom we are counsellors, will not be backward, if we furnish them with the least ground, to be our censurers.

And here I would affectionately suggest to my numerous amiable young friends, the benefit to be derived to their own minds from turning a certain portion of their time to the personal

instruction of the poor, for which so wide a field is just now providentially opened. In communicating the elements of religious knowledge — in numberless repetitions of the same plain truths — in being obliged to begin again the simple document which they fancied they had long ago impressed — in the humbling necessity of lowering their ideas, and debasing their language, in order to make themselves intelligible — in the forbearance which dulness of intellect, perverseness of temper, and ingratitude demand, they may gain some proficiency themselves, even where their success with others is least encouraging.

But to whatever account we turn our time with respect to others, the first object of its right employment is with ourselves; and this not only in discharging those exercises of piety and virtue, which are too obvious and too generally acknowledged, to require to be specified; but, in attending to the secret dispositions of the mind, in order to ascertain its real character. We do not mean to imply that we can judge of its state by the thoughts which are necessarily suggested by any actual business, or any pressing object, such thoughts being the proper demand of the occasion, and not any certain indication of our abiding state and habitual temper. But, by watching the nature and tendency of our spontaneous thoughts, we may, in a great measure, determine on the cha-

racter of our minds; their voluntary thoughts and unprompted feelings, being the streams which indicate the fountain whence they flow. The heart is that perennial spring; for, whether grace or nature supply the current, the fountain is inexhaustible. In either case, the more abundantly it flows, the more constantly its waste is fed by fresh supplies; expense, instead of exhausting, augments the stream, whether the source from earth supply worldly thoughts, or that from above such as are heavenly. Thoughts determine on the character: *as the man thinketh, so is he.*

What a scene will open upon us, when, from our eternal state, we shall look back on the use we have made of time! What a revolution will be wrought in our opinions! What a contrast will be exhibited, when we shall take a clear retrospect of all we have done, and all we ought to have done! And shall we, then, put off the inspection to an uncertain period, to a period, when we can neither repent to any purpose for what was wrong, nor begin to do what we shall then perceive would have been right? Let these frequent meditations on death lead us to reflect what the feelings of a dying bed will be. Let us think now what will then be the review of riches mis-spent, of talents neglected or perverted, of influence abused, of learning misapplied, of time misemployed! To entertain serious thoughts of death now, is the most likely

method for rectifying tempers, for conquering propensities, for establishing principles, for confirming habits, of which we shall then feel the consequence; for relinquishing enterprises and pursuits, for the success of which we may then be as much afflicted, as we should now be at the defeat.

He who cannot find time to consult his Bible, will find, one day, that he has time to be sick; he who has no time to pray, must find time to die. He who can find no time to reflect, is most likely to find time to sin; he who cannot find time for repentance, will find an eternity in which repentance will be of no avail. Let us, then, under the influence of the Divine Spirit, seriously reflect, under what law we came into the world; "it is appointed for all men once to *die*, and, after death, the JUDGMENT." Is it not obvious, then, that the design of life is to prepare for judgment; and that in proportion as we employ time well, we make immortality happy?

## CHAP. IX.

### ON CHARITY.

In that general use of the Talents suggested in the parable, there is also a particular vocation, on the exercise of which, every man must equitably determine. Each is particularly called upon to acquit himself of that more immediate duty, for the practice of which, God has given special endowments and opportunity. Our Maker requires the specific exercise of the specific talent. The nature of the gift points out the nature of the requisition. The use of the endowment is a peculiar debt, a marked obligation. This is not a gift confounded with the mass of his gifts, but one by which God designs to be, by that individual, more remarkably glorified.

But *charity* is a virtue of all times and all places. It is not so much an independent grace in itself, as an energy, which gives the last touch and highest finish to every other, and resolves them all into one common principle. It is called "the very bond of perfectness," not only because it unites us to God, our ultimate perfection, but because it ties all the other virtues

together, and refers them, thus concatenated, to Him, their common source and centre.

St. Peter having given a pressing exhortation to many exalted duties, finishes by ascribing to charity this emphatical superiority; "*Above all things*, have fervent charity." It is, indeed, the prolific principle of all duty: a confluence of every thing that is lovely and amiable: the fountain from which all excellencies flow, the stream in which they all meet. It is not subject to the ebb and flow of passion or partiality —it is true Christian sympathy. It is tender without weakness; it does not arise from that constitutional softness which may be rather infirmity than virtue. It is the affection of the Gospel; a love derived from the Spirit of Christ, and reciprocally communicated among his genuine followers.

Charity comprehends an indefinitely wide sphere, both in feeling and doing. According to the arrangement of St. Paul, in his beautiful personification of this grace*, she may be said to embrace almost the whole scheme of religious, personal, and social duty. "Patient and kind," she does not wait to be solicited to acts of benignity, she seizes the occasion—she does more, she watches for it. She "endures" evils, but inflicts none; she does not select her trials, but "bears all things." Though "she believes all things," yet she exercises her hope without re-

* First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xiii.

linquishing her prudence; sometimes, where conviction forbids her thinking favourably, even then it does not prevent "her hoping all things." She subdues "vaunting," conquers the swellings of insolence, and the intractableness of pride. Not only "she envieth not," not only she disallows the injustice of desiring what is another's, but, by a noble disdain of selfishness, she even "seeketh not her own." Her disinterestedness stirs her up to the perpetual rooting out that principle wrought by nature into the constitution of the soul. So far from thinking it a proof of spirit to resent injuries, she is not "easily provoked" by them. She smooths the fierceness of the irascible, and corrects the acrimony of the evil-tempered. She not only does not perpetrate, but "she thinketh no evil." She has found a shorter way of becoming rich than avarice ever invented, for charity makes another's goods her own by a simple process; without dispossessing the proprietor, she rejoices so much in another's prosperity that it becomes hers, because it is his.

Here we see that the Apostle places charity not only before all the virtues which he thus gracefully marshals, before qualities the most moral, gifts the most spiritual, attainments the most intellectual, but he actually degrades these last in the comparison; he does not barely lower their value, he annihilates it. Without this principle of life, this soul of duty, this essence of

goodness, they are not only little, they are nothing. Without charity, possessions, talents, exertions, are all fruitless. They are of no value in the sight of God: they are of no efficacy to our salvation. Charity alone sanctifies our offerings, recommends our prayers, and makes our very praises acceptable.

And though nothing is formally efficacious but the blood and merits of Christ, yet charity, as a divine grace, and one that will never cease, shows that our interest in him, and union with him, are real and genuine.

But to descend to the particulars of charity, and apply the different branches of it to the common purposes of life.—Whenever we are promoting the good of mankind, either by assisting public institutions, or relieving individuals, we are obviously helping on the cause of charity; and, when we cannot effectively assist the work, we may exercise the principle; we may pray for the happiness which we cannot confer, and rejoice in every addition to the general good towards which we cannot contribute. On the other hand, the purse may sometimes be open where the heart is shut. And it is perhaps a more rare and a higher virtue to exercise forbearance towards the faults, and to put a candid construction on the actions, of others, than to supply their wants, or promote their temporal interests. But whether candour in judging, or liberality in giving, be the virtue in exercise, by

the adoption of each as a law, and the practice of both on the ground of conformity to the Divine will, we shall acquire such a habit of exercising the kind affections, that what was adopted as a principle will be established into a pleasure; what was a force upon nature, will almost grow into a part of it; obligation will become choice, law impulse, duty necessity; the energy will become so powerful, that the heart will involuntarily spring to the performance; indolence, selfishness, trouble, inconvenience, will vanish under the vigorous operation of a habit whose motive is genuine Christianity.

One Christian grace is never exercised at the expense of another, nor is it perfect, unless it promotes that other. Thus charity enjoys abstinently that she may give liberally. While she restrains every wrong inclination, she stimulates us to such as are right. She is never a solitary quality, but is inseparably linked with truth and equity. She leads us perpetually to examine our means, dispositions, and opportunities, and to exert their combined force for the promotion of the greatest possible good. She teaches us to contribute to the comfort of others as well as to their necessities. She converts small kindnesses into great ones, by doing them with reference to God; for it is not so much the worth, as the temper, which will render them acceptable to him.

We must not judge of our charity by single

acts and particular instances, for they are not always good men who do good things, but by our general tendencies and propensities. We must strive after an uniformity in our charity—examine whether it be equable, steady, voluntary, and not a charity of times, and seasons, and humours. If we are as unkind and illiberal in one instance as we are profuse in another, when the demand is equal, and we have both the choice and the means, whatever we may be, we are not charitable.

Though charity, as we have already observed, is a quality of universal application, and by no means limited within the narrow bounds of almsgiving, yet, not to allow a due, that is, a high rank and station to those works of benevolence to which our Redeemer gives so conspicuous a place in his exhibition of the scrutiny at the general judgment, would be mistaking the genius of Christianity, would be departing from the practice and the principles of its Founder; it would be forgetting the high dignity he conferred on this grace, when he declared that he should consider the smallest work of love done to the the least of his followers for his sake as done to himself.

This pecuniary charity is not be limited to our particular connections — must not be confined to unfounded attachments, to party-favourites. It must be governed by the law of justice. We must not do a little good to one

which may involve a greater injury to another: yet, though we should keep our hearts always open and our feelings alive to the general benefit, still, as our power must be inevitably contracted, whatever right others may have to our beneficence, local circumstances, natural expectations, and pressing necessity, confer the more immediate claim. The *most* immediate is that of "the household of faith."

Some worthy men give their *money* to charitable puposes, some give their *time*; and they do well. But he who gives his time that he may examine the truth of the want, in order that he may relieve it, does better. He takes Job for his model, — "The cause which I knew not I searched out."

From hence it appears, that in enquiring into the duties of charity, we must not overlook the use to be made of riches, one of the talents implied in the parable. The application of money, whether "kept by its owners to their hurt," or squandered to their destruction, will equally be made the subject of final investigation. Lord Bacon's remark, that "riches, when kept in a heap, are corrupt like a dunghill, but, when spread abroad, diffuse beauty and fertility," has been more admired than acted upon. All the fine sentences that have been pelted at the head of covetousness, have probably never reformed one miser; nor have the most pointed aphorisms, not divinely directed, ever taught the luxurious

the true use of money. Happily the age in which we live is so generally disposed to acts of beneficence, that there never was a period which less imposed the necessity to press the duty, to enforce the practice, or to point out the objects. A thousand new channels are opened, yet the old ones are not dried up; the streams flow in abundance, as if fed by a perennial fountain.

Let not any one, however, intrench himself in the supposed security of surrounding goodness. Let not any take comfort that he lives in an age of charity, if he himself is not charitable. We are not benevolent by contact or infection, or by breathing an atmosphere of charity. Yet who has not heard persons exultingly boast of this noble characteristic of the age, who are by no means remarkable for contributing their own contingent towards establishing its character? Probably many a man gloried in the valour of his country, and exulted in the pride of being an Englishman, after the battles of Trafalgar and Salamanca, who, had he been sent into the action, would have been shot for cowardice.

Who has not seen the ready eye discharge its kindly showers at a tale of woe, and the frugal sentimentalist comfort himself that his tears had paid more cheaply the debt of benevolence, for which his purse had been solicited. The author, many years ago, made one in a party of friends: an expected guest, who was rather late, at length came in; she was in great agitation, having been

detained on the road by a dreadful fire in the neighbourhood. The poor family, who were gone to bed, had been with difficulty awakened. The mother had escaped by throwing herself from a two pair of stairs window into the street. She then recollected, that, in her extreme terror, she had left her child behind in bed. To the astonishment of all present, she instantly rushed back through the flames; and, to the general joy, soon appeared with the child alive in her arms. While she was expressing her gratitude, the light of the lamps fell on its face, and she perceived, to her inexpressible horror, that she had saved the child of another woman — her own had perished. It may be imagined what were the feelings of the company. A subscription was instantly begun. Almost every one had liberally contributed, when a Nobleman, who could have bought the whole party, turning to the writer of these pages, said, "Madam, I will give you —" every expecting eye was turned to the Peer, knowing him to be unused to the giving mood; the person addressed joyfully held out her hand, but drew it back on his coolly saying, "I will give you this affecting incident for the subject of your next tragedy." Some will read this passage who were present on the occasion.

But since neither the logic nor the rhetoric of the writer, were she so happy as to possess either, is likely to make the "churl liberal," or

to stir up the vain or the voluptuous to a beneficence which shall bear any fair proportion to the costly maintenance of their luxury or their vanity, the slight observations which follow shall be addressed to the bountiful giver, a character, blessed be God, as common as it is amiable. To the act it is unnecessary to excite him; to the motive he cannot too carefully look. This is the more requisite, as, in an age in which more excellent charity sermons are annually preached than ever were delivered since the establishment of Christianity — that, which alone, of all the religions in the world, ever made charitable foundations a part of its institution — we now and then meet with one, which seems to invert the principle, and to put the point for the base. It is with diffidence we put the question, dreading to be suspected of indulging a spirit of censure where we would wish to offer unqualified commendation; but do we not now and then hear assigned to almsgiving, nay assigned to the individual contribution for which the well-intentioned preacher is eloquently pleading, a merit so vast, that it would seem to supply the absence of all other merits; a merit which would almost induce one to believe that a more than ordinary contribution to the plate would prove a golden key, to stand in *his* stead, who "has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers?"

To explain my meaning by an example: — In the Temple of *Him* who gave his Son to die,

to atone for the sins of the world, I once heard, and from no mean authority, Charity called *the atoning virtue of the age.* To have termed it the prevailing, the distinguishing, the most amiable characteristic of the age, had been right and true. But when I found it thus gravely proposed as an expiation for sin, I was ready to imagine that I heard the exclamation of St. Paul to his Galatians — "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ unto another Gospel."

We most readily not only allow for, but admire, the ardour of an animated preacher, who, feeling his heart expand with his subject, finds it as much his delight, as his duty, to impart to every bosom the tender and compassionate sympathies with which his own overflows; and it is with reluctance we have presumed to imitate the restraints, which Christian piety should impose on itself in not overstating even a Christian duty.

We have no right to determine on the proportions and possibilities of any man's charity, but on the principle we may determine; there must be an exhaustless spring in the heart, even where the Christian's means will not admit of a perpetual current. Love is in fact that motive principle, without which neither faith, nor mysteries, nor martyrdom, no nor even the addition of the second guinea to the plate, where only one had been intended, nor giving all our goods to the poor,

will profit any thing. Where this vital spirit is wanting, the most ample bounty will not reach its end; where it exists, "the cup of cold water" shall be accepted. Without this animating principle, though the bounty may obtain applause, may influence others, may do good, and promote good, yet it may unhappily fall short of promoting the spiritual interests of the giver. He who has promised to render to every man according to his deeds, knows the principle of the deed, and has never promised to recompense any which has no reference to himself.

To neglect works of charity, not to be largely liberal in the performance of them according to our ability, is an infallible evidence that our professions of piety mean nothing. On the other hand, to depend upon them as what is to bear us out in our claims for heaven, before the tribunal of God, is to offend our Maker and deceive our own souls. We would be the very last to undervalue, or to discourage charity, but is it discouraging it to place it on its true ground; to assert that we may build an hospital without charity, as we may endow a church without piety, if we consider the one as an expiation for sin, or the other as a substitution for holiness?

Some are ingenious in contriving, by a strange self-delusion, to swell the amount of their charity, by tacking to it extraneous items of a totally

distinct character. The author was formerly acquainted with a lady of rank, who, though her benevolence was suspected to bear no proportion to the splendour of her establishment, was yet rather too apt to make her bounties a subject of conversation. After enumerating the various instances of her beneficence, she often concluded by saying, "notwithstanding my large family I give all this in charity *besides paying the poor-rates;*" thus converting a compulsory act, to which all are equally subject, into a voluntary bounty.

Our corruptions are so liable to infect even our "holy things," that we should be vigilant in this best exercise of the best affections of the heart — affections which God, when he graciously converted a duty into a delight, gave us, in order, by a pleasurable feeling, to stir us up to compassion. We should be careful that the great enemy may not be plotting our injury, even when we are performing actions the most hostile to his interests.

As there is not a more lovely virtue in the whole Christian code, so there is not one which more imperatively demands our attention to the spirit with which we exercise it, and the temper with which we bear the disappointment sometimes attending our best designed bounties. Though charity is too frequently thrown away on those who receive it, it is never lost on the benefactor, if "he who gives does it with simplicity." When the bountiful giver cannot find

pleasure, he may always extract good. He may reap no small advantage himself from that liberality which has failed to confer any. He may gain benefit from the disappointment he experiences in the unworthiness of the object. When the project he had anxiously formed for doing good to another is defeated by perverseness, or requited by ingratitude, it not only does not check the spring of bounty in the real Christian, but it calls new virtues into action. The exercise of patience, an improvement in forbearance and forgiveness, a stronger conviction that we must not make the worthiness of the object the sole measure of our bounty, are well worth the money we have spent on the undeserving. Perhaps, too, the reiterated instances how little good the best man is able to do in this world, may serve to wean him from it, and be an additional inducement for looking forward to a better.

But it is much easier to relieve our neighbour's wants, than to bear with his errors; the one gratifies our natural feelings, while the other offends them; the most difficult as well as the most sublime branch of charity, therefore, is the forgiveness of injuries, is the love of our enemies. It is a love humbly aiming to resemble his, who sends his rain on the just and on the unjust; a love not inspired by partiality, not extorted by merit. It is following the example, while we obey the precept, of Christ, when we

"do good to them that hate us." It is a charity which bursts with a generous disdain the narrow bounds of attachment and even of desert, levels every fence which selfish prudence would erect between itself and its enemies; it is a love with respect to the objects, though with a boundless disproportion as to the measure, resembling God's love to us; it aims to be universal in kind, though it is low in the degree.

A very able divine* has insisted, that it is to this part of the character of the Almighty that our Saviour limits the injunction, "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is, indeed, one of the principal instances in which finite creatures can by imitation approximate to the character of God; most of his attributes rather requiring us to adore, than leaving it possible for us to imitate them. For though all the attributes of God afford the most exalted idea of complete perfection, yet the injunction to attain his image is strikingly applied in the New Testament to this particular part of the divine character. The Apostle applies our being "followers of God, as dear children," afterwards to this individual instance, "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you," adding, "and walk in love as Christ also loved us." "So that," says the

* See Bishop Sherlock's sermon on the text, "Be ye perfect," &c. &c.

Bishop, " his exhortation to follow God stands inclosed on both sides with the precepts of love and charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else." St. Luke, who gives us an abridgment of the same sermon on the mount from which the passage is taken, also suggests the practice of love and forgiveness from the example of the Almighty, " who is kind to the unthankful and the evil." After having delivered the same beatitude, he corroborates the interpretation with an injunction, by saying, not be *perfect*, but " be merciful as your Father also is merciful."

Our Saviour impressed a solemn emphasis on the command to forgive the offences of others, when he implicated it with God's forgiveness of us. It is to be feared, that many who would think it an act of disobedience to omit the daily repetition of the divine prayer, of which this request forms so striking a clause, do not lay to heart the daily duty of supplicating for that frame of spirit which the petition involves. Can there be a more awful consideration, than that we put the grand request on which our eternal happiness depends, on this issue, when we inseparably associate our own hope of pardon, with the required and reasonable condition of pardoning others? Should we not be conscientiously cautious, how we put up this petition, when we reflect, that we offer it to the great Searcher of hearts, who, while he listens

to the request, can exactly determine on the integrity which accompanies it? The divine Author of the prayer seems to hold out a sort of test of the spirit of our obedience, when he proposes this difficult duty, as a trial of our general conformity to his commands. It seems selected by Infinite Wisdom as a kind of pledge of our submission to his will in all other points: our interest is confederate with our duty in the practice of this high and peculiarly Christian grace. The requisition suggests at once the most absolute obligation, and the most powerful motive.

This forgiveness seems not only to be one of the grand distinctions between the religion of the Heathen and the Christian world, but to form a considerable difference between the duties inculcated in the Old and the New Testament. In the former, indeed, there were not only indications and suggestions of this rule, but some exemplifications of its actual performance. It is remarkable, that when David, whose energy of character, or rather mysterious inspiration as a prophet, led him to be so vehement in his denunciations of vengeance on persons of professed enmity against God, and against himself as the anointed of God, yet exhibited eminent instances of placability in his conduct towards his own personal enemies, especially in the case of Saul. But, perhaps, the duty, after all, was not so fully made out, so

clearly defined, so positively enjoined, nor was the frame of mind so evidently seen in "them of old time." We have many instances under that dispensation, of saints and prophets laying down their lives for their religion, but it was reserved for the first New Testament Martyr, when expiring under a shower of stones from his enemies, to say, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The reason is obvious. It being expected, that our notions and practices should be adapted to the revelation under which we live, this sublime species of charity should necessarily rise in proportion to the clearness and dignity of that dispensation. It is congruous, therefore, that our forgiveness of injuries should be exercised in far higher perfection under the Gospel, the professed object of which was to make a full and perfect revelation of the pardon of sin by the blood of a Redeemer. And we can only be said to have a conformity to his image, in proportion as we practise this grace. Let us, however, remember to borrow the thought of an eminent divine, "that our forgiving others will not alone procure forgiveness for ourselves, while our not forgiving others is a plain proof, that we ourselves are not forgiven."

## CHAP. X.

### ON PREJUDICE.

THERE is not a more curious subject of speculation, than to observe the variety of colours with which opinion tinges truth; the bias which prejudice lends to facts, when it cannot deny them; the perversion it gives to the motive, when it cannot invalidate the circumstance; the warp and twist it gives to actions which it dares not openly condemn; the disingenuousness into which it slides, even though it does not intend to maintain a falsehood; the bright rays with which it gilds, perhaps unconsciously, its own side of a question; the dark cloud by which it casts that of an adversary into shade.

Prejudice, if not altogether invincible, is, perhaps, the most difficult of all errors to be eradicated from the human mind. By disguising itself under the respectable name of firmness, it is of infinitely slower extirpation than actual vice. For vice, though persisted in through the perverseness of the will, never sets itself up for virtue; a vicious man knows what is right, though his appetites deter him from following it; but a prejudice, being perhaps

more frequently a fault of the judgment than of the heart, is sometimes persisted in upon principle. No man will defend a sin as such, but even good men defend a prejudice, though every one else sees that it is producing all the effects of a sin, promoting hatred, souring the temper, and exciting evil passions.

Yet, though it may incidentally be attached to a good man, there are few errors more calculated to estrange the heart from vital religion, because there are none under which men rest so satisfied. Under the practice of any immorality they are uneasy, and that uneasiness may lead to a cure; for the light of natural conscience is sufficiently strong to show, that sin and peace cannot dwell together. But prejudice effectually keeps a man from enquiring after truth, because he conceives that he is in full possession of it, and that he is following it up in the very error which keeps him so wide of it. Or if, with the Roman governor, he ask, "What *is* truth?" like him, he turns away for fear of an answer. The strongest light cannot penetrate eyes that are closed against it; while to the humble, who desire illumination, God gives not only the object, but the faculty of discerning it.

As it is mental, rather than moral prejudice, which is the present subject of consideration, we shall say little of those prejudices of which the passions and appetites are the cause. In-

terest and sensuality see the objects which absorb them through their own dense medium, while the vision of either is probably clear enough in judging of the objects of the other's passion; the blindness being partial, and confined, like the lunacy of some disordered patients, to the single object to which the disease has a reference.

Even probity itself is not of sufficient force to guide our conduct; we see men of sound integrity and of good judgment on subjects where prejudice does not intervene, acting, where it does, below the standard of ordinary men, governed by a name, carried away by a sound. It makes lovers of truth unjust, and converts wisdom into fatuity. It must, therefore, be an enlightened probity, or we may be injuring our fellow-creatures, when we persuade ourselves we are doing God service. Paul does not appear to have been a profligate, but to have been correct, zealous, and moral, and to have earned a high reputation among his own narrow and prejudiced sect. His error was in his judgment. The error of Peter was in his affections. A sudden touch of self-love in this vacillating, but warm-hearted disciple, made him dread to share in his Master's disgrace. But, in this case, a single penetrating glance melted his very soul, brought him back to contrition, repentance, and love. To cure the prejudices of Paul, a miracle was necessary.

While the powerful arguments of our Lord put even the Sadducees, the infidels of the day, "to silence," they produced no such effect on the professing Pharisees; instead of rejoicing to hear their great doctrine of the resurrection so fully vindicated, they redoubled their prejudices against him, at the very moment in which he had obtained such a triumph in their cause. The first thing they endeavoured, was to seek to entangle, by their casuistry, him who had just defeated the common enemy.

But, let us judge even the prejudiced without prejudice. Prejudice, to a certain degree, is not so much the fault of the individual, as of our common nature. And that sober tincture of it, which is inseparable from habits and attachments, is a fair and honest prepossession: —for instance, who ever reprobated, as a censurable prejudice, that generous feeling,

For which our Country is a name so dear?

But, after all, prejudice, of some kind or other, is a natural inborn error, attached to that blindness which is an incurable part of our constitution.

Disagreement of opinion, therefore, if it be an evil inseparable from our present state of being, ought not to excite antipathy; complete unanimity of heart and sentiment being reserved as part of the happiness of that more perfect state, where the effulgence of truth will dissipate

all the error and misapprehension which cloud our judgment here.

People commonly intend to judge fairly; and, when they fail, it is as often an error of the understanding as of the heart. They form their opinion of some particular subject from what they see of it. But though they see only a part, they frequently form their opinion of that which remains unseen, more peremptorily than those who see the whole; for a large and clear view, by affording a justness of conception, commonly induces humility. Perhaps, on their ignorance of those very parts of a question which they do not see, they form their decision on the whole; while the unseen points are precisely those which only could enable them to determine fairly on the general proposition.

We should not, however, very severely censure any for the mere opinion they form, this being a matter of the judgment rather than of the will; the true object of censure is their conduct under this false impression; in acting as hostilely as if their opinion was founded on the best ascertained facts. If we are all more or less prejudiced, it does not follow, that the conscientious act upon the feelings which the prejudice has excited. The harsh and the intolerant, indeed, let loose upon their adversaries all the bad passions which this disposition to prejudge opinions has stirred up; while the mild spirit in which Christianity governs, will con-

duct itself with the same general kindness as if no diversity of opinion subsisted. Though all prepossession arises from some cloudiness in the mind, it is a fair trial of the Christian temper, when the man who suffers by it continues to exercise the same tolerant and indulgent spirit towards the prejudiced party, as if there were a mutual concurrence of sentiment. If he have no other ground of objection to the person from whom he differs, there is something of a large and liberal spirit in acting with him, and speaking of him, on other occasions, as if the matter in debate did not exist.

How endless and intricate are the misleadings of political prejudice! It is as detailed and minute in its operations, as it is broad and extensive in its compass. Will not the circumstance of voting on the same side often stand instead of the best qualities, in recommending one man to the good opinion of another? With this unfounded partiality is naturally connected a dislike to better men, on the mere ground of their taking the opposite side; for party, which takes such a large permission to think and act for itself, takes care never to allow to others the liberty which it so broadly and uniformly assumes.

He who drinks deep into the spirit of party, minutely pencils all the shades of misrepresentation; his prejudice blackening, his partiality whitening; the one deforming what is fair, the

other beautifying what is foul; the one defacing temples, the other garnishing sepulchres. Providence, in the mean time, working its own way by these perverse instruments; the worst designers being sometimes surprised into doing more good than they intended, by a wish to anticipate the good projected by the opposite party, and so to throw an odium upon them, for not having been able to effect the same, though they had perhaps planned it, and though adverse circumstances alone had interrupted the scheme, or the want of a suitable occasion had delayed its accomplishment. Thus good is effected, the public is benefitted, all are pleased. The conscientious rejoice that it is done at any rate; the prejudiced, that their party have the credit of doing it.

There are among the exhaustless manœuvres of a party-champion, if I may so speak, gestures and signs of disapprobation, which are of equal efficacy with language itself. There are also artifices in writing, that resemble intonation and accent in a skilful speaker, which, by a turn of the voice, or a clause in a parenthesis, throw in a shade of distinction, lend an emphasis which makes mystery intelligible, and helps out the apprehension of the reader. There is such a thing as an intellectual shrug of the shoulders, a mental shake of the head, an implication that has more meaning than an assertion, a hint which can effectually detract from

the commendation which prudence had extorted, and which serves to awaken suspicion more than a direct charge. Whatever is omitted, is sure to be more than supplied; whatever is dexterously left open by the writer, never fails to be overcharged by the reader, who always values himself on his ingenuity in filling up a hiatus. There is a way of setting out with general praise, in order to make the meditated charge more effectual. A practised reader will see through the artful circumlocutory preface, which is gradually preparing to introduce the little, though effectually disparaging particle *but*. These artifices raise up the ghost of some unknown evil in the character to be injured, and excite, at the same time, the idea of prudence and moderation in the censurer. It is a mysterious giving out, an assumed regret at being compelled to speak, a hypocritical conscientiousness, a reluctance of communication which, after it has told much more than all it knows, tenderly affects to have kept back the worst.

One evil which commonly arises from the perusal of a work of systematic opposition, whether the object be public or private, is, that it has a tendency to bias the more liberal reader, who took it up in the most impartial state of mind, with as undue a prejudice in favour of the party attacked, as the assailant laboured to establish in favour of his own; so that, if any injustice be excited, it is on the contrary side to

that which the author intended. Generally speaking, however, people do not sit down with a pure design to read impartially any thing, which, from the title of the work, or the name of the author, they foresee or suspect is likely to contradict their creed whether previously adopted from conviction or prepossession.

But, to confine our observations to the prejudices which embitter common life:—when we fancy we have been injured by some unfounded evil report, let us avoid considering the character of the reporter, or our own supposed injury, under the immediate impression of the intelligence, but try to divert our thoughts to some other subject, till our heated spirits have time to cool. We shall otherwise, too probably, feel and utter many things which exceed the bounds of strict justice. When the resentment has, in some measure, subsided, let us endeavour to collect and retain only the simple and exact truth; what the enemy really said, and not what we suspect he might say. Let us retrench all that is imaginary, all that is merely suspicion; let us cut off all the aggravations of conjecture, all the inventions of passion, all the additions of revenge, all that belongs to unsubstantiated report;—when these due retrenchments are made, we shall often see that the injury is not so great. It is no wonder if the object we saw through a mist was enlarged; a clear medium reduces it to its natural size.

But, supposing the worst to be true; religion, operating on observation, will at length teach us to set these metaphysical evils, these afflictions of the imagination, this anguish of wounded pride or irritated self-love, over against the real, deep, substantial miseries of body and mind, under which thousands of our fellow-creatures, nay many of our friends, are at the moment sinking; and we shall blush at our own irritability; we shall bless God for the lightness of our own lot; we shall even be thankful for that evil which exists only in the opinion, or the report of a fallible creature, and which makes no part of our real self.

But, above all, let us never revenge the injury by opposing *our* injustice to that by which we suffer, by acting against our opponents with the same spirit with which we accuse them of acting against us. Retaliation, which is the justice of a vulgar mind, is of the very essence of an unchristian spirit. Where this is indulged, all the virtues of the adversary are rooted out by our resentment, and it is well, if we do not plant vices in their room. Or if we do not invent faults for them, are we not too much disposed to take comfort in those they have; to cherish unkind reports of them, to give them a welcome hearing and a wide circulation? Nay, self-estimation and rooted prejudice may lead us entirely to mistake the character of him we call our enemy. A man is not necessarily wicked

because he does not admire us. He may dislike some of our notions without hating our persons; or, after all, his prejudices may not be entirely ill-founded; and if we will examine ourselves on the ground of his charge in some particular instance, we may find, that we have been wrong in a way which we might not have discovered without him. If his detection of our error lead us to correct it, we should not reckon that man among our worst enemies: or, if we should happen to be right, there is a great advantage in being assisted by the mode of attack, to know how to collect materials for our defence.

We must also learn sometimes to endure censure for things right in themselves, and, under existing circumstances, necessary, which yet may not appear right to others, because it may not be prudent to disclose those secret springs of action, which, if revealed, would convince others that we have not acted wrong. Instead of spending our spirits in invective, or spoiling our temper by hatred; instead of liking our faults the better, or adhering to them the more, because pointed out by those we dislike; would it not be wiser to enquire, if our opinions may not be prejudices, as well as theirs? For does it inevitably follow, that even the dislike of bad men is any certain proof of our goodness; though our natural propensity to think our own conduct and opinions right, disposes us to think them more right in proportion to the opposition

which is made to either. We are blind to our own singularities, even though those singularities may be errors; and a spirit of resentment or resistance makes that blindness often more obstinate. On the other hand, may we not be too much disposed to think our censurers, whom we call wicked, more wicked than they are; or, though there may be errors in their conduct, this does not take from them the capacity of judging of ours. Even though their hearts are wrong, their judgment, as far as relates to others, may not be totally perverted. It is no infallible proof of their bad judgment, that they think meanly of ours.

But allowing that their judgment is as incorrect as their practice, and that their dislike proceeds from the "strong antipathy of bad to good," yet we may turn this dislike to profit. That hostility to religion, of which the Scripture so frequently speaks, is not intended to give the Christian a high notion of his own piety, but to encourage him against the fear and dejection which that hostility might create. If he meet with opposition, he must not fly for refuge to his own goodness, as contrasted with the faults of his opponents; nor must he be depressed, "as if some strange thing had happened to him;" much less must he convert the opposition he meets with, into an evidence, that he is in all instances right. In the consolations which the Gospel holds out to the sufferer for

righteousness'-sake, it was intended to inspire him with courage, not vanity; with confidence in God, not in himself. He must not, therefore, so much value himself because he has enemies, as suspect that he may have enemies, because he has deserved them. Or, perhaps, there is something wrong in us which we have not yet discovered, for which God permits us to have enemies. This suspicion may serve to render us circumspect, and quicken our endeavours to remove the ground of their censure. This, even if it do not reconcile them to us, will still make us gainers by their enmity; so that, in any case, the Apostle's interrogation, "And who is he that shall harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" loses nothing of its force.

Who can forbear to lament, when he sees such a litigious spirit pervade superior minds, such airy nothings conjured into difficulties, sufficient to clog the wheels of the noblest undertakings; an effect resulting merely from the partiality with which even wise men sometimes cleave to their own prepossessions, added to a reluctance to examine what may possibly be wrong on their own side, or right on the other?

It would be comparatively a small evil, if prejudices were only fostered on occasions in which religion has no concern. If we could hope to see such a general proficiency in true

piety, that, where the sentiments of men concurred on all essential points, each side would sacrifice something on points that were indifferent, it would be a sort of realisation of the communion of Saints. But if it be called an act of Omnipotence to "make men of one mind in a *house*," what would it be to make them of one mind in a town or a kingdom? If we could witness a cordial agreement between those who profess to have the interests of the same religion at heart, such a concurrence in the wish to promote its great practical objects, as would render them willing to concede their own theories, or their own judgment, in things that do not affect any of the vitals of religion, with such noble materials worked up into action, what a glorious world might this become! This combination of Christian feeling would extinguish all unkind debate, "all malice, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking." This peace-offering would oblige no one to renounce his principles; yet, by the extinction of petty differences, by such a confederacy of honest hearts and candid spirits uniting for some great public object, this wilderness would almost be converted into the garden of God. Nor would an inferior portion of the benefit be derived to the minds of those by whom, for a cause of general importance, the inconsiderable sacrifice was made; so far from it, it would be hard to say which made up the largest aggre-

gate of good, the private exercise of individual virtue, or the promotion of the general end. But, alas! do we not sometimes see Christians more forward in attacking and exposing each other, than in buckling on their arms to make war on the common enemy? Are they not more ready to wage that war against a pious brother, who does not view some one opinion exactly in the same light with themselves, though equally zealous in the promotion of general truth, than against those who have no religion at all? What a church triumphant would ours be in one sense, though still militant in another, if there was a union of real Christians joining in one firm band to assail the strong holds of vice and immorality, instead of laying open each other's errors and mistakes, and thus exposing the great cause itself to the derision of the unbeliever.

We cannot dispute ourselves into heaven, but we may lose our way thither, while we are litigating unimportant topics — things which a man may not be much the better if he hold, and which, if he hold them unrighteously, he might be better if he held them not. The enemies of religion cannot injure it so much as its own divisions about itself.

He who is zealously running after a favourite opinion, is in danger, in order to establish his point, of losing his moderation by the way, and over-stepping truth at the end: and, what is

worse, of converting the sober defence of his own system into a hostile attack of that of another; for a hot disputant seldom wages defensive war. The point under discussion so heats his temper, as to make him lose sight of its relative importance. Every consideration gives way in support of that opinion which has now the predominance in his mind. And this opinion is not seldom contended for with an eagerness proportioned to its real want of solidity; since great and important objects are seen by their own light, and require not the false fire of pride or passion to blazon their worth. Often does the hot controvertist assert that to be of the very essence of religion, which is but a mere adjunct; and often he seems to wonder how men can bestow so much time and thought on any other topic, while his grand concern is under consideration.

It is because these rooted and unexamined prejudices involve human affairs in so much perplexity, that the rectification of our judgment is one of the most important objects of our concern. The opinion which others entertain of us, though it may hurt our fortune or our fame, yet it cannot injure our more essential interests. Their judgment of us can neither wound our conscience nor shake our integrity. The false judgment we form of *them* may do both, especially if we act upon the opinion we have formed; if we speak injuriously of those

of whom we think unkindly; if, by following a blind prejudice or precipitate judgment, we decide upon their characters, without possessing those grounds for determining which we insist are indispensable in the opinion they form of us. Jealously, resentment, envy, often darken our perceptions, and are secretly operating on our minds, while we persuade others, and too probably ourselves, that we are promoting the interests of truth and justice, in exposing the faults, or counteracting the schemes of another.

Controversies will be for ever carried on, though converts are not made; for I do not remember, that of the ancient sects of philosophers any went over to their opponents. Among the professors of the old school divinity, it does not appear that the disciples ever changed their master — that the advocates of the *angelical* Doctor ever adopted the cause of the *irrefragable* *; and it is evident that the followers of Jansenius and Loyola died with the same mutual hostility in which they had lived.

As truth, however, will be assaulted, it must be defended. Controversial discussions, therefore, are not only harmless, but useful, provided truth be the inspiring motive, and charity the medium of conducting them. Truth is frequently beaten out by conflicting blows, when

* Scotus, Aquinas, and the other school divines, were distinguished by these and similar epithets.

it might have contracted rust and impurity by lying quiet, uninquired into and unassailed. We are in danger of growing negligent about a truth which is never attacked, or of surrounding it with our own fancies, and appending to it our own excrescences; while the assailant teaches even the friendly examiner to clear the principle of all foreign mixtures, and by giving it more purity, to give it wider circulation.

But, as we before observed, a thorough partisan in religion, as well as in politics, seldom takes up a book of controversy with an unbiassed mind. He has a pre-determination which seldom gives way to argument. He does not see, that the supporter of his own cause may be maintaining it in a wrong temper; that, while he is fighting for orthodoxy, he may be aiming his side-blows at a personal antagonist, or giving the death's wound to charity. He does not perceive, that he may be injuring the interests of practical religion, while he is labouring to promote such as are doctrinal, that he may be inflaming the temper, while he is informing the understanding. Yet a controversy is sometimes so managed, that, though truth may be vindicated, the minds of plain Christians may be little informed. Such readers do not understand the logician's terms, which, though they may have the effect of silencing the opponent, do but little towards enlightening the mind or strengthening the

faith. Controversies, therefore, in religion or politics often do little good, in comparison of the labour they cost, and the evil tempers they excite. They are seldom read by those to whom, if temperately conducted, they might be of the most service — the unprejudiced. The perusal is commonly confined to two classes, friends and enemies. Now the friends and enemies of a writer form but a small proportion of the world of readers. Of these, the one flies to the book to get his prepossessions strengthened, the other, to get his antipathies confirmed. The partisan was pre-determined that no arguments should shake him, the adversary sat down with the same liberal resolution. Nay, the probability is, that he will declare his former opinion is more immovably settled by the very reasons the opposer has suggested, so that he feels he is furnished with fresh arms by the antagonist himself.

But though neutrality is not a state of mind to be desired, moderation is. Even these polemical Christians, if each would look calmly and kindly on the other, might discover in his opponent a striking likeness of his own features, if not an entire similarity of complexion; a likeness sufficient to prove that they are both of the same family, all children of one common Father, though they do not carry the exact resemblance in some minuteness in which parity is not necessary to prove affinity. The general

family-likeness should, however, operate as an inducement to treat each other with. brotherly kindness, even if they were not assured, which they all profess to be, that the common Father will be the common Judge.

## CHAP. XI.

### PARTICULAR PREJUDICES.

It is no inconsiderable part of our duty in our necessary connections with that motley mass of characters of which mankind is composed, to conquer certain prejudices which are too apt to arise, especially in persons of fastidious temper and delicate taste, against those, who, though essentially valuable in their general character, have something about them which is positively disagreeable; or who do not fall in with some of our ideas, or whose manners are not congenial to our feelings. To wait before we love our fellow-creatures, till their character be perfect, is to wait till we meet in heaven; and not to serve them till the feeling be reciprocal, is to act on the religion of the publican, and not of the Christian. We should love people for what we see in them of the image of their Maker, though it be marred and disfigured. That piety which makes them amiable in His sight, should prevent their being disgusting in ours. If we consulted our principles more, and our taste less, it would cure us of this sharp inquest into their infirmities.

Yet, on the other hand, if religious, but coarsely-mannered persons, however safe they may be as to their own state, could be aware how much injury their want of delicacy and prudence is doing to the minds of the polished and discriminating — who, though they may admire Christianity in the abstract, do not love it so cordially as to bear with the grossness of some of its professors; nor understand it so intimately, as to distinguish what is genuine from what is extrinsic — if they could conceive what mischief they do to religion, by the associations which they teach the refined to combine with it, so as to lead them inseparably to connect piety with vulgarity, they would endeavour to correct their own taste, from the virtuous fear of shocking that of others. They should remember, that many a thing is the cause of evil, which yet is no excuse for it; that many a truth is brought into discredit by the disagreeableness which may be appended to it, and which, though utterly foreign, is made to belong to it.

In addition to the infirmities which, from the fault of nature, or the errors of education, are not perhaps so easily avoided, there are others which are purely voluntary. Certain religionists there are, who torment themselves with a chimera till they become the victims of the prejudice of their own creation. There is a querulous strain of pious vanity, in which, with a most unamiable egotism, they delight to indulge. It is a sort

of traditionary lamentation of evils, which, having once been the lot of Christianity in the most awful extreme, are assumed to be still, in no inconsiderable degree, attached to its followers. Surrounded with all the conveniences of life, and faring comfortably, if not sumptuously, every day, they yet complain of persecution, as if Christianity still subjected its followers to the sufferings of those primitive disciples, "of whom the world was not worthy." But let them compare the dreadful catalogue of torments enumerated by the Apostle to the Hebrews — enumerated the more feelingly, as he had experienced, in all their extremity, the sufferings he describes; — let them compare these with their own petty trials, of which, the worst they have ever felt or feared, is that "of mockings:" "*cruel* mockings," perhaps, as to the temper of the reviler, but innoxious to the imaginary sufferer. The glorious profession of the saints of old brought on them bonds and imprisonments by order of the government. Ours is sanctioned by the ruling powers. "*They* were destitute, afflicted, tormented;" our distresses are seldom caused by our piety, but frequently by our want of it. *They* were denied the exercise of their religion, we are protected in ours. *They* were obliged to meet clandestinely at undue hours in incommodious places. With us, provision is made for public worship, and attendance on it encouraged and commanded.

Let none of us, then, proudly or peevishly complain, as if our abundant piety was either forbidden, discouraged, or under-rated. Private prejudice, and individual hatred, are indeed sufficiently alive, but the blows they aim fall hurtless as the feebly-lifted lance of Priam. If, then, we allow ourselves to murmur at our own disadvantages, will it not look as if we inwardly lamented that we are so very good to so little purpose; as if we repined at not being rewarded by universal applause for the superabundance of our piety? May we not, by our complaints, lead the world to suspect that our goodness was practised as a bait for that applause, and that, having missed it, we feel as if we had laboured in vain?

But, from the prejudices which one class of Christians are too ready to indulge against another, we return to those of a different character; to the philosophical man of the world, who is prepossessed not so much against any particular class of Christians, as against Christianity itself. These unhappy prejudices are often laid in by an education in which no one thing has been neglected except religion. The intellect has been enlarged by the grandeur, and polished by the splendour, of Pagan literature, which took early possession of the yet vacant mind, and still maintains its ascendancy with that power and energy which naturally belong to first, and therefore deep, impressions. The subsequent

character continues to feel the effect of the excessive admiration early excited by some favourite authors, by whom the more impetuous passions and generous vices are exalted into virtues, while the spurious virtues are elevated into perfections little short of divine, and the whole adorned with whatever can captivate the fancy and enchant the taste; with beautiful imagery, ingenious fiction, and noble poetry. Who, indeed, does not feel divided between admiration at their writings, and regret, that the writers were not providentially favoured with divine illumination? Their brightness, like that of ebony, is a fine polish on a dark substance.

Here the indignant man of letters, if any such should condescend to cast an eye on these pages, will exclaim, Are scholars, then, necessarily irreligious? God forbid! far from me be such a vulgar insinuation — far from me such a preposterous charge; not only against a multitude of eminent lay-Christians, but against the whole of that large and venerable body, whose life and labours are dedicated to religion, all of whom are, or ought to be, learned.

But it is nevertheless true, reason on it as we may, that, in the state of excitement above described, every youth of taste and spirit, who has not been early grounded in Christian principles, must necessarily afterwards first open the volume of Inspiration, and find it destitute of all that

false but dazzling lustre with which the page of ancient learning is decorated.

And what must considerably add to the prejudice which may reasonably be expected to be thus excited, is, that they find the great object of one religion has been to pull down all the trophies of false glory, which the other had so successfully reared. The dignity of human nature, of which they have read and felt so much, is laid prostrate in the dust. Man is stripped of his usurped attributes, robbed of his independent grandeur. A new system, of what appear to him mean-spirited and sneaking virtues — charity, simplicity, devotion, forbearance, humility, self-denial, forgiveness of injuries — is set up in direct opposition to those more ostensible qualities which are so much more flattering to the natural human heart.

These obstacles to religious progress are removed, when, in early institution, the defective principles of the one school are not only pointed out and guarded against, but are even, as is frequently the case, converted into salutary lessons, by being placed in just contrast with the other, and are made at once to vindicate the scheme, and to exalt the principles of Christianity.

But he into whose character these principles have not been infused, is too likely to set up on the stock of his own underived powers. The cardinal vice of an irreligious reasoner will

naturally be that pride which sets him on considering the Gospel as a narrower of human understanding, a debaser of the soaring spirit of intellectual man, a fetter on the expatiating fancy, a clog on the aspiring mind. This opinion, which he rather adopts by hearsay or tradition than by studying the sacred volume, continues to keep him ignorant of its contents. He is satisfied with knowing Christianity only in the state in which it is presented to him in certain passages, torn from their proper position, disjoined with malignant ingenuity, and distorted by perverted comment, from that connection which would have solved every difficulty, and annihilated the triumphant cavil. Or if, under this influence, he take a superficial glance at Christianity, he sees a religion, which, though it prohibits no legitimate greatness, yet a religion whose object is not to make man, according to the estimation of this world, great. His secret prejudices, too, may be augmented by the revolting doctrine, that he is not able to do any thing right of himself. He is to do the work, and to give the glory to another. After having followed with rapture the conqueror of Carthage hanging up his victorious laurels in the Capitol, he will feel indignant to be taught, that the Christian conqueror, instead of glorying in his triumphant crown, "casts it before the throne."

He had observed in Pagan lore, abstract truth prepared for the philosopher, pageants,

feasts, and ceremonies for the people. This distinction of rank and intellect flattered human pride. In Christianity he finds one rule, and that a plain rule: one faith, and that a humbling faith; one scheme of duties, irrespective of station or talents: while, in the other, the systems of the learned, and the superstitions of the vulgar, were as distinct as any two religions, and as inefficacious as none.

But, after all, it is not the idolatry exhibited in the Greek and Roman writers, that, perhaps, can overthrow his faith, though their licentiousness may affect his morals. The hardest blow to his principles will be given by the modern champions of unbelief; by writers against whom the young are not on their guard, because, without Christianity, they slide in under the general title of Christians, disseminating contraband wares under false colours. The wound inflicted by the baptized infidel is more profound than that of the polytheist, whose absurdities render his aim comparatively innoxious. The preposterous systems of a false religion are harmless, compared with objections raised, misrepresentations sent forth, and sarcasms insinuated against the true one.

But if the enthusiastic votary of those systems go no farther than to establish philosophy as his standard, and taste as his guide; when he is brought to think — not that philosophy and taste are to be abandoned, for Christianity

requires no such sacrifice — but that they are to be admired subordinately, the misfortune is, that the second half of life is sometimes spent in imperfectly counteracting the principles imbibed in the first half. It is not easy to get rid of the prepossession in favour of a morality untinctured with religion; of "that love of fame which the pure spirit doth raise," but which it is the office of the renewed spirit to lower — of the admiration exhausted on splendid, but vicious characters — of the idolatry cherished for unprincipled heroes — of the partiality felt for all the powerful rivals which genius has raised up to religion — of all the sins that poetry has canonised — all the sophistry that praise has sanctified — all the pernicious elegancies of the gay — all the the hollow reasonings of the grave.

In this state of neutrality between religion and unbelief, happy is it for the faltering novice if he be not fatally offended, that Christianity admits people who are not elegant-minded, who are not intellectual, to the same present advantages, to the same future hope, with the profound thinker, and logical reasoner. And, even after the most successful struggles in this new science, it will still be found, and the discovery is humiliating, that the religious attainments of the unlearned are often more rapid, because less obstructed, than those of "the wise and the disputer of this world." It requires at least a smattering of wit and knowledge to be

sceptical, while the plain Christian, who brings no ingenuity into his religion, is little liable to the doubts of the superficial caviller, who seeks to be "wise above what is written." For if the endowments of the unlearned are smaller, they are all carried to one point. They have no other pursuit to divide or divert their attention; they have fewer illusions of the imagination to repel; they bring no opposing system to the Christian scheme; they bring no prejudices against a revelation which holds out a promise of reversionary happiness to those who are destitute of present enjoyments; and Christianity will generally be more easily believed by those whose more immediate interest it is to think it true. They have no interfering projects to perplex them; no contradictory knowledge to unlearn; their uninfluenced minds are open to impressions, and good impressions are presented to them. They have less pride to subdue, and no prepossessions to extinguish. They have no compromise to make with Christianity, no images of deities, which the philosopher, like the Emperor Tiberius, wishes to set up in the same temple with Christ; no adverse tenets which they wish to incorporate with his religion, no ambition to convert it into a better thing than he made it. We have seen how much philosophy early impeded the reception of pure Christianity in some of the wisest and most virtuous Pagan converts. Origen and Tertullian did not

receive the truth from heaven with the same simplicity as the fishermen of Galilee.

To prove that this is no flight of enthusiastic fancy, let us recollect with what an extraordinary elevation and expansion of soul the Author of our religion bore his divine testimony to this truth: "I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." He then, instead of accounting for it by natural means, resolves the mystery into the good pleasure of God — "*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*"

Even the vulgarity which, as we have already observed, mixes with, and debases the religion of the man of inferior attainments; the incorrect idiom in which he expresses his feelings and sentiments; the coarse images and mean associations which eclipse the divine light, do not extinguish it. they rather, in some measure, prove its intrinsic brightness by its shining through so dense a medium. When the man of refinement sees, as he cannot but see, what amelioration Christianity confers on the character of the uneducated; how it improves his habits, raises his language; what a change it effects in his practice, what a degree of illumination it gives to his dark understanding, what consolation it conveys to his heart; how it lightens the burdens of his condition, and cheers

the sorrows of his life — he will, if he be candid, acknowledge, that there must needs be a powerful efficacy in that religion which can do more for the ignorant and illiterate, than philosophy has ever done for the great and the learned. And is it not an unanswerable evidence of the truth of Christianity and the power of grace, when we see men far surpassing all others in every kind of knowledge, themselves so far surpassed in religious knowledge by persons absolutely destitute of all other.

But if these weak and humble disciples afford a convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity; if even these low recipients exhibit a striking exemplification of its excellence, yet we must confess they cannot exhibit an equally sublime idea of Christian perfection, they cannot adduce the same striking evidences in its vindication, they cannot adorn its doctrines with the same powerful arguments, as highly educated Christians. Habituated to inquiry and reflection, these are capable of forming more just views of the character and attributes of God, more enlarged conceptions of his moral government. They have also the advantage of drawing on their secular funds, to augment their spiritual riches. They are conversant with authors contemporary with the inspired writers. Acquaintance with ancient manners and oriental usages also gives great advantage to the lettered readers of Scripture, and, by enabling them to throw

new light on passages which time had rendered obscure, adds fresh strength, and double confirmation, to a faith which was before "barred up with ribs of iron." *

Scripture also affords a larger range of contemplation to those enlightened minds who study human nature at the same time, or who have previously studied it; because it was upon his knowledge of the human character that the Saviour of the world so strikingly accommodated his religion to the wants and the relief of that being for whose salvation it was intended.

The better educated, also, will better discern, because it demands a higher exercise of the rational powers, that passages of a similar sound have not seldom a dissimilar meaning; and that it is not the words, but the ideas, which constitute the resemblance. The want of this dis-

* The paltry cavil on the impossibility that the penitent woman could anoint the feet of Jesus as he sat at meat, could only mislead such readers as were unacquainted with the recumbent posture in which the ancients took their meals. The triumphant sneer at the paralytic, who was let down from the house-top through the tiling with his couch, could only shake the faith of those who are ignorant of the manner in which the houses of eastern countries were roofed. — Whether infidel writers took advantage of the supposed ignorance of their readers, or whether their ridicule of these imputed absurdities of Scripture arose from their own ignorance, we will not determine. Instances might be multiplied without number of this ignorance, or of this disingenuousness.

cernment has led many well disposed, but ill informed persons, into mistakes.

Again: — Many detached texts are meant as a brief statement of a general truth, and intended to lead the reader into such trains of reflection as shall "exercise unto godliness," instead of exhibiting a full delineation and giving the whole face and figure, every side and aspect of the subject. Scripture frequently proposes some important topic in a popular manner, without making out its full deductions, or its series of consequences. Now, for the fuller understanding these heads, and turning them to their due improvement, the advantage lies entirely on the side of the thinking and the reasoning reader. It must be confessed, however, that the humble, though illiterate Christian, is able to attain all the practical benefits of these suggestions. He compares Scripture with Scripture; he substitutes no opinions of his own for those he there meets with; he never attempts to improve upon Christianity; he never wishes to make the Bible a better thing than he finds it. By diligent application, and serious prayer, his understanding enlarges with his piety. Above all, he does the "will of God;" and, therefore, "knows of the doctrine that it is of God."

It must be confessed, also, on the other hand, that the professed scholar, by converting Scripture learning into theses of discussion, is in some danger of making his knowledge more

critical than practical. The same reason, which is meant to enlighten, may be employed to explain away his faith; and his learning, which adorns, is capable also of being turned to discredit it.

We must, however, admit, that when our supposed man of high education becomes essentially pious, his piety will be of a higher strain. It is more pure, more perfect, more exempt from erroneous mixtures, more clear of debasing associations, more entirely free from disgusting cant and offensive phraseology; less likely to run into imprudence, error, and excess; less in danger of the gloominess of superstition on one hand, and the wildness of fanaticism on the other. Having the use of a better judgment in the choice, he is not in the same danger of being misled by ignorant instructors; he is not liable to be drawn away by a vanity so difficult to restrain in the uneducated religious man; a vanity so frequently excited when he sees his own superiority, in this great point, to his worse-informed neighbours. From this vanity and this want of the restraint of that modesty imposed by superior education, the man of low condition often appears more religious than he is, because, being disposed to be proud of his piety, he is forward to talk of it. While the higher bred frequently appear less pious than they really are, from the good taste and delicacy which commonly accompany a cultivated mind. There is

also another reason why they exhibit it less; they are aware that, in their own society, the exhibition would bring them no great credit.

If unlettered Christians labour under some disadvantages, we repeat it, they yet afford an internal evidence of the truth of Christianity, and an evidence of no small value. They show that it is the same principle which, when rightly received, pervades alike all hearts; a principle which makes its direct way to understandings impervious to the shafts of wit, and insensible to the deductions of reasoning — to minds sunk in low pursuits, indurated by vulgar habits. It is a striking proof of its being the same principle, that such seemingly disqualified persons possess as clear views of its nature, at least of its broad and saving truths, as the man of genius and the scholar; destitute as they are of all his advantages, wanting perhaps his natural perspicacity, unused to his habits of inquiry, incapable of that spirit of disquisition which he brings from his other subjects to the investigation of this. No one, if he examine impartially, can fail to be struck with this grand characteristic of the truth of Christianity — not only, that in all degrees of capacity and education in the same country, but that in different countries, in those where taste and learning are carried to the highest perfection, and in dark and ignorant nations, where not only the sun of science has never dawned, but where literature has never softened,

nor philosophy enlarged the mind, where no glimpse of religion can be caught by a reflex light, as is the case in polished and Christian countries,—yet, wherever Christianity has made its way, and pierced through the native obscurity, there the genuine spirit, and the great essential fruits of the Gospel, will be found just the same; the same impression is made by the same principle; the same results spring from the same cause, and the disciples of Christ, whether it be the converted Greenlander or the academical believer, are recognized in all their distinguishing features, are identified in all the leading points. Such a concurrence in sentiment, feeling, and practice, such a union in faith, hope, and charity, amongst persons dissimilar in all other respects, unlike in all other qualities, unequal in all other requisites; minds never made to be akin by nature thus allied by grace, bearing the same stamp of resemblance in spirit as their possessors bear in the common properties of body: — all this is a convincing proof that there must be something divine in a principle which can assimilate such contrarieties — which can re-unite those in one common centre who differ in all other respects — which can annihilate all other distinctions to produce identity in the leading point. Does not all this prove it indeed to be the work of God, a work which requires not previous accomplishments or preparatory research, but only a willing mind,

an unprejudiced spirit, and a humble heart? Does it not prove that where the essence, and the power, and the spirit of Christianity really reside, it will produce the one grand effect, *a new heart and a new life?*

## CHAP. XII.

### FARTHER CAUSES OF PREJUDICE.

It is a singular fact that the infidel and the fanatic sometimes meet at the same point of error, — that reason has little to do with religion. The enthusiast we are hopeless of convincing by argument, because he is commonly ignorant; but the lettered sceptic may be better taught even by his pagan masters. Plutarch, after a large discussion whether brutes had any reason, determines in the negative from this consideration, *because they had no knowledge or feeling of a Deity.* The great Roman orator expresses the same idea when he asserts, *that a capacity for religion was the distinguishing mark of rationality, and that this capacity is the most unequivocal sign of reason.*

Yet sound reason and Christian piety are sometimes represented as if they were belligerent powers, and as if *Orders in Council* had been issued to cut off all commerce between them; as if they were better calculated eternally to meet sword in hand, than in the conciliatory way of treaty and negotiation; as if every victory of the one must necessarily be

obtained at the expense of the other's defeat. But is it not an affront to the Giver of every good gift to represent his highest natural and his supernatural endowments as infallibly hostile to each other? It is evident that when reason and religion act in concert, they strengthen each other's hands. But when they injudiciously act in opposition, perverted reason starves the ardour of piety, or ill-judging piety hands over reason to obloquy and scorn. In every case the ill-understood jealousy of each injures the interests of both.

The truth is, sound and sober Christianity is so far from discountenancing the use of reason, that she invites its co-operation, knowing that it possesses powerful arms to defend her cause; to defend her against the encroachments of error, the absurdities of fanaticism, the inroads of superstition, the assaults of infidelity. But while she treats it not as a rival but an ally, Christianity, strong in Almighty strength, maintains her own imperial power uninfringed. While she courts the friendship of her confederate, she allows not her own uncontrolled superiority to be usurped. She assigns to reason its specific office, and makes it know and keep its proper limits. The old law, indeed, being a formula of ceremonies, and a digest of ordinances for one particular people, left not so full an exercise for the use of reason. Descending to the most minute particulars, and being ex-

panded into the most detailed directions, it left little for the disciple but to read the rule and follow it. But the New Testament being, as we have elsewhere observed, rather a system of principles, than a mere didactic table of small as well as great duties, leaves much more to the exercise of reason, and furnishes a much larger field for the understanding to develope, to compare, to separate, to combine. The whole plan of duty is, indeed, most clearly and distinctly laid open; but every uniting particle, every intermediate step, every concatenating link, is not traced out with amplitude and fulness.

The more instructed Christian will perceive that some expressions are merely figurative; some are directions for persons under one circumstance, and some for those under another. The Gospel requires, indeed, as implicit submission from the Christian, as the law required from the Jew; but while it proposes truths, all of which equally demand his obedience, some of them require more especially the use of his reflection, and the exercise of his sagacity. We allude not to the great "mysteries of godliness," but to duties which are of individual application.

If we were to pursue prejudice through all its infinite variety, we should never have done with the inexhaustible subject. Observation presents to us followers of truth of a very different cast, though their uniform object be the same. These

persons, while they sometimes seek her Temple by different paths, are yet oftener kept wide of each other by words than by things. Whatever, indeed, be the separating principle, prejudice is always carried to its greatest height by the impatience of the too fiery on the one hand, and the contempt of the too frigid on the other. But both, as we observed, maintain their distance more by certain leading terms by which each is fond to be discriminated, and by an intolerance in each to the terms adopted by the other, than by any radical distinction which might fairly keep them asunder. Now we do not wish them to relinquish the use of their peculiar terms, because these terms either do, or should designate to their minds the most important characters of religion. The Christian should neither shrink from his own strong hold, nor treat with repulsive disdain him who appears earnest in his approaches towards it, though he has not as yet, through some prejudice of education, sought it in a direct way. There are many terms, such as *faith* and *grace*, and others which might be mentioned, which subject the more advanced Christian to the imputation of enthusiasm and the charge of cant. These, however, are words which are the signs of things on which his eternal hopes depend, and he uses them, even though he may sometimes do it unseasonably, yet not as the Shibboleth of a profession, but because there are no others

exactly equivalent to their respective meanings. In fact, if he did not use them when occasion calls, he would be deserting his colours, and be making a compromise, to the ruin of his conscience.

But let him not in return fall too heavily on what are, to his ear, the obnoxious terms of his adversary. Let him not be so forward to consider the terms *virtue* and *rectitude* as implying heresies that must be hewed down without mercy; as substantives which must never find a place in the Christian's vocabulary. They are not only very innocent but very excellent words, if he who utters them only means to express by Virtue those good works which are the fruits of a right faith, and by Rectitude that unbending principle of equity and justice which designates the confirmed Christian. The abuse of these terms may, indeed, make the more pious adversary a little afraid of using them, as the unnecessary multiplication of ordinary cases in which the more scriptural terms are pressed into the service, may make the less advanced Christian unreasonably shy of obtruding them.

But why must we vilify in others what we are cautious of using ourselves, in order to magnify what we choose to adopt? We should rather be glad that those who somewhat differ from us, come so near as they do; that they are more religious than we expected; that if they are in error, they are not in hostility; or if seemingly

averse, it is more to the too indiscriminate and light use of the opponent's terms, than to the sober reception of the truths they convey. Let us be glad, even at the worst, to see opposition mitigated, differences brought into a narrower compass. Let us not encounter as leaders of hostile armies, but try what can be done by negotiation, though never of course by concession in essentials. If the terms Virtue and Rectitude are used to the exclusion of faith and grace, or as substitutes for them, it may afford an opening for the pious advocate to show the difference between the principle and its consequence, the root and its produce. He should charitably remember that it is one thing for an honest enquirer to come short of truth, and another for a petulant caviller to wander wide of it. It is one thing to err through mistake or timidity, and another to offend through wilfulness and presumption. If the enquirer be of the former class, only deficient and not malignant, he may be brought to feel his deficiency, and is often in a very improvable state. It would therefore be well to let him see that you think him right as far as he goes, but that he does not go the whole length. If he professes "to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts," this is no small step: yet he may still require to be convinced that it is "by the grace of God teaching him." Here the two ideas expressed by your term of Grace, and his of Virtue, are brought into united action, with this difference, or if you please with this

agreement, that yours being the cause, and his the effect, the Christian character attains its consummation between you. You must, however, endeavour to convince him, that though the greater includes the less, the reverse cannot be true; that faith and grace in the Christian sense involve virtue and rectitude, but virtue and rectitude in the philosophical sense desire to be excused from any connection with faith and grace. But the offence taken at terms creates hostility at the outset, blocks up the avenues to each other's heart, and leads men to be so filled with the things in which they differ, as to keep them in the dark as to the things in which they agree.

The more strict disputant will perhaps continue to insist that no such terms as virtue and rectitude are to be found in any Evangelist. Granted. — Neither do we find there some other solemn words expressive of the most awful verities of our religion. The holy *Trinity* and the *satisfaction* made by the death of Christ, are not, I believe, in any part of the New Testament expressed by these terms, which were first used some ages after in the Byzantine church. But can it be said, that the things themselves are not to be found there? They are not only conspicuous in every part of the Gospel, but make up the sum and substance of what it teaches.

While each disputant, then, contends for his own phrases, let not the one suspect that Grace

and Faith are the watch-words of enthusiasm, nor the other conclude that infidelity skulks behind virtue, and pagan pride behind rectitude. St. Paul expressly exhorts his converts to "add to their faith virtue," and if the inverted injunction was never given, it was not because faith was unnecessary where virtue previously existed, but because virtue, Christian virtue, never could have existed at all without previous faith. In enjoining virtue, the Apostle, upon his own uniform principle, supposes the Christian to be already in possession of faith; this he ever considers the essential substance, virtue the inseparable appendage. Thus the Divine Preacher on the Mount, in his prohibition of a hypocritical outside, does not say, Give alms, fast, pray; he concluded that his followers were already in the practice of those duties, and on this conviction grounded his cautionary exhortation, *when* thou doest alms, *when* thou prayest, *when* thou fastest. He taught them to avoid all ostentation in duties, to which he alluded as already established. Be it observed, by the Saviour himself no attribute is so constantly enjoined or commanded as faith. His previous question to those who resorted to him to be cured, was not if they had *virtue*, but *faith*; but never let it be forgotten, that as soon as the cure was performed, the man of faith was enjoined, as the surest evidence of his virtue, *to sin no more*.

## CHAP. XIII.

### HUMILITY THE ONLY TRUE GREATNESS.

HUMILITY is one of those qualities of which Christianity requires the perpetual practical exercise. It does not insist that we should be constantly feeding or instructing others — that we should be every moment engaged in acts of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, or of mortification to ourselves; but, whether we teach or are taught, whether we communicate our good things to others, or are dependent on others for the communication to ourselves, humility is required as the invariable, the indispensable, the habitual grace, in the life of a Christian. Pride being the radical distemper of the natural man, the business, the duty, the blessedness of the spiritual man is to be freed from it.

However valuable high intellectual attainments have been found in the vindication of religion, however beneficially talents and learning have been exerted in adducing the evidences and augmenting the illustrations of divine truth, yet for the most striking exemplification of genuine piety, "To this man will I look, saith

the Lord, who is of an humble spirit." Christianity gives a new form to the virtues, by recasting them in this mould. Humility may be said to operate on the human character like the sculptor, who, in chiseling out the statue, accomplishes his object, not by laying on, but by paring off, not by making extraneous additions, but by retrenching superfluities, till every part of the redundant material is cleared away. The reduction which true religion effects, of swelling passions, irregular thoughts, and encumbering desires, produces at length on the human mind some assimilation to the divine image — that model by which it works — as the human resemblance is gradually, and at length successfully wrought in the marble.

Christianity, though equally favourable to the loftiest as to the lowest condition of life, was not intended to make man great, but to make him contented to be little. Though no enemy to the possession and cultivation of the highest mental powers, but affording, on the contrary, the noblest objects for their investigation, and the richest materials for their exercise, yet she rests not her truth on their discussions, nor depends for making her way to the heart on their reasonings. While the cheering approbation of a humble faith is an encouragement repeatedly held out in the Gospel, there is not one commendation of talent, except for its application — not the least notice of rank or riches

except to intimate their danger — not any mention of the wisdom of this world, except to pronounce its condemnation.

Humility stands at the head of the beatitudes, and is incorporated with them all; and the gracious injunction, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," is a plain intimation, that our Redeemer particularly intended that portion of his own divine character, for the most immediate object, not of our admiration only, but of our imitation. It is the temper which of all others he most frequently commends, most uniformly enjoins, and which his own pure and holy life most invariably exhibits. If we look into the Old Testament, we see that God, after having described himself as "the high and holy One which inhabiteth eternity," by a transition the most unexpected, and a condescension the most inconceivable, immediately subjoins, that "He dwelleth with the contrite and the humble;" and this from a motive inexpressibly gracious, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Is it not incredible that, after these repeated declarations and examples of the Almighty Father and of the Eternal Son, pride should still be thought a mark of greatness, an ebullition of spirit, and that humility should be so little understood to be the true moral dignity of Christians? While in the religion which they profess, there is no excellence to which it is not

preliminary, and of which it is not the crown; nor are other virtues genuine but as they are accompanied with this grace, and performed in this spirit. No quality has acquired its perfection till it is clarified and refined by being steeped in humility.

It is indeed essential to the very reception of Christianity, for, without this principle, we shall be disposed to cavil at divine revelation, to reject, at least, every truth revolting to human pride; we shall require other ground for the belief in God than his revealed word, other evidence of his veracity than the internal conviction of our spiritual wants, and the suitableness of that remedy which the Gospel presents to us. This principle, therefore, is indispensable; without it, we shall be litttle inclined cordially to receive Christianity as a light, or to obey it as a rule. Without it, we shall not discover the evil of our own hearts; and, without this discovery, we shall by no means value the grace of the Holy Spirit; we shall exercise no habitual dependence on the promised assistance, nor seek for a support of which we do not feel the want.

But humility, by leading us to form a just estimate of ourselves, teaches us to discern the narrowness of our capacities. It reminds us, that there are many things even in the works of God's natural creation far above our comprehension; that from the ignorance and blindness

of our minds we make frequent mistakes, and form a very erroneous judgment about things comparatively obvious and intelligible. This temper will bring us to credit with fuller cordiality the testimony which God in his word gives of himself, and cure us of the vanity of rejecting it, on the mere ground that we cannot comprehend it. It will deliver us from the desire of being "wise above what is written," and is the sole antidote to the perils of that promise of unhallowed knowledge, with which the grand seducer tempted his first credulous victims.

It is not till humility has practically made known to us how slowly religion produces its effect on ourselves, that we cease to marvel at its feeble influence and slow-paced efficacy on those around us. As a consequence, this principle leads the humble Christian to be severe in judging himself, and disposes him to be candid in judging others. When he compares himself with worse men, it furnishes a motive, not for vanity, but gratitude; when with better, for additional self-abasement.

St. Paul seems to have been fully aware of the lagging movement which even Christians make towards the complete attainment of this heavenly temper. In his address to the Colossians, after having expressed his firm hope of their sincere conversion, in that they had "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," he

yet finds it expedient to exhort them; and, for this very reason, "to put on," together with other Christian qualities which he enumerates, "humbleness of mind."

He might have pressed this duty under the supposition of two cases, and, in either, the injunction would be just. As they had made a public profession of Christianity, he intimates, that there was no surer way of evincing that their profession was sincere, and their conversion radical, than by this unequivocal mark, the cultivation of a humble spirit. Or, on the other hand, however deeply rooted they might be in faith and piety, he might feel it necessary to remind them, that they should not consider themselves as having attained a perfection which left no room for improvement. So far was this deep proficient in divine wisdom from thinking that all was done when the convert had entered on his new course, he enjoins them, even after this effectual change, that they should, as a consequence as well as a proof, *therefore* "put on" this Christian grace; and produces their conversion as a motive, "*because* you are already renewed." He does not recommend any specific act, so much as a general disposition of "mind," implying, according to his uniform practice, that growth was necessary to life, and progress to perfection.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the discourses of its Divine Author, are rather pointed

against certain radical evil principles, than extended to their lesser ramifications. When the powerful artillery of the Gospel was more especially levelled against the strong holds of pride, it included in the attack all the minor offences resulting from it; implying, that if the citadel be conquered, the intimidated forces in the outworks will make but a feeble resistance.

Even the worldly and the careless, who are perhaps too inattentive to perceive that humility is the predominating feature in the truly religious character, as well as the most amiable and engaging part of it, yet pay it a sort of involuntary homage in adopting its outward appearance. Many among the more elegant classes of society, who cannot be brought to adopt the principle, assume the form, as the most unequivocal mark of their superior condition. But while the well-bred exhibit the polished exterior of humility in *manner*, they are called, as Christians, to cultivate the inward and spiritual grace. In spite of the laws against egotism which the code of good breeding has issued, a nearer intimacy sometimes discloses the self-satisfaction which politeness had thinly veiled. While we are prone to carry our virtues in our memory, we cannot be always on our guard against producing them in our conversation. Such virtues, for the most part popular ones, caught our taste perhaps from the applause with which they were received, or the eloquence with which they were set forth in our

presence: and as we acquired them in public, and by hearing and reading, we shall be contented to exercise them in profession and talk. Many, and very many of these qualities may be grafted on the old stock, and look green and flourishing, whilst they "have no root in themselves;" but genuine humility springs out of a root deeply fixed in the soil of a renewed heart, and takes its first ground on the full conviction of our apostasy from God.

As we make a proficiency in this humbling knowledge of ourselves, our confidence in our own virtues proportionably diminishes. The delight we once received in the contemplation is first abated by self-distrust, and finally abolished by self-acquaintance. Then we begin to profit by the deep sense of our own weakness, and to send forth the genuine fruits of a strength and a virtue derived from higher sources. And thus, the sound conviction of our own frailty, though purchased at the expense of a great error, may prove, if we might venture to say it, of more real benefit to our own mind, than the performance of a splendid action, if of that action all the use we had made had been to repose added confidence in our own strength, or to entertain higher notions of our own goodness.

Yet, while we ought to be deeply humbled at every fresh detection of evil in our hearts, to be discouraged at the discovery from proceeding in our Christian course is so far from being an

effect of humility, that it is rather the result of pride. The traveller who meets with a fall, does not recover his ground by lying still and lamenting, but by rising and pursuing his journey. Joined with this faulty despondency, or still more frequently preceding it, is to be traced the operation of a blind and morbid pride. Particularly, if the intimation of the fault we have committed comes from others, the heart is found to rise at the bare suggestion that we are not perfect. We had perhaps been guilty of a hundred faults before, of which, as others took no notice, they made little impression on ourselves. We commit a smaller error, which draws the eyes of the world upon us, and we are not only dejected but almost hopeless. The eye of God was equally witness to our preceding faults, yet from their being secret, they produced little compunction, while that which is obvious to human inspection produces sorrow on the mere ground of producing shame. Perhaps we were permitted to fall into this more notorious error that we might be brought to advert to those of which we had been so little sensible; and though the depression consequent upon this fault is rather the consciousness of mortified pride, than of pious contrition, yet God may make use of it to awaken us to a feeling of our general corruptions, to warn us not to depend on ourselves, and to put us on our guard against "secret

faults," as well as against open and "presumptuous sins."

Even a good man is not entirely exempt from the danger of occasional elation of spirit; even a good man does not always judge himself so rigorously as he ought; yet, though he makes too many partial allowances, is too much disposed to softenings and abatements, to apologies and deductions, still he is, on the whole, suspicious of himself, distrustful of his own rectitude, on his guard against habitual aberrations from humility. Though tremblingly alive to kindness, his sincerity makes him almost ready to regret commendation, because his enlightened conscience tells him, that if the panegyrist knew him as he knows himself, it would have been bestowed with much abatement; and he is little elated with the praise which is produced by ignorance and mistake. Though he has fewer faults than some others, yet, as he must know more of himself than he can know of them, his humility will teach him to bear patiently even the censure he does not deserve, conscious how much he does deserve for faults which the censurer cannot know.

There is, however, no humility, in an excessive depreciation of ourselves. We are not commanded to take a false estimate of our own character, though a low would be too frequently a just one. While the great Apostle St. Peter was contented to call himself *the servant of Jesus*

*Christ*, his self-constituted successors, by an hyperbole of self-abasement, have denominated themselves *servants of the servants of God*. And yet they have not, it is to be feared, *always* surpassed the disciple they profess to follow, in the display of this apostolic grace.

Nor is the appearance of this quality any infallible proof of its existence. Nothing is more common than to hear affability to the poor produced as an undoubted evidence of the humility of the affluent. The act, indeed, is always amiable, whatever be the motive; but still the expression is equivocal. Does it not sometimes too much resemble that septennial exhibition of humility which calls forth so much smiling condescension from the powerful, while it conveys "an hour's importance to the poor man's heart?" The one enjoys the brief, but keen delight, of reviling his superiors with impunity, with the better gratification of conferring favours instead of receiving them; the other, like Dryden's Achitophel, "bowing popularly low," wins, by his courtesy, that favour which he would not perhaps have obtained by his merit. But the curtain soon closes on the personated scene:— the next day both fall back into their natural character and condition. The periodical condescension at once reinstates itself into seven years' dignity, while the *independent elector* cheerfully resumes his place in his *dependent* class,

till the next Saturnalia again invite to the reciprocal exchange of character.

Where the difference of condition is obviously great, nothing is lost, and something may be gained by familiarity. The condescension is so apparent, that though it properly excites both admiration and gratitude in the indigent, it does not infallibly prove the lowliness of the superior. The impassable gulf which separates the two conditions, the immovable fences which establish that distance, preserve the poor from encroachment, and the rich from derogation: no swellings of heart arise against the acknowledged dependent, no dread of emulation against the avowed inferior. Even arrogance itself is gratified at seeing its train augmented by so amiable a thing as its own kindness. Notice is richly repaid by panegyric, and condescension finds it has only stooped to rise. If we give pleasure in order to be paid with praise, we had better be less liberal that we might be less exacting. The discreetly proud are aware, that arrogant manners bar up men's hearts against them; their very pride, therefore, preserves them from insolence; the determined object being to gain hearts, and their good sense telling them that a haughty demeanour is not the way to gain them, they know how to make the exterior affable in proportion as the mind is high; for the ingenuity of pride has taught it that popularity is only to be obtained by con-

cealing the most offensive part of itself. Thus it can retain its nature and gratify its spirit, without the arrogant display by which vulgar pride disgusts, and, by disgusting, loses its aim.

The true test is, how the same person feels, and how he conducts himself, towards him whose claims come in competition with his own, — who treads on his heels in his pretensions, or surpasses him in his success, — who is held up as his rival in genius, in reputation, in fortune, in display, — who runs the race with him, and outstrips him. More severe will be the test, when the competitor is "his own familiar friend," who was his equal, perhaps his inferior, in the contest for academical honours, but is now a more fortunate candidate for the prizes which the world distributes, or his decided conqueror on the professional arena.

His humility is put to the trial, when he hears another extolled for the very quality on which he most values himself, — commended for something in which he would, if he dared, monopolise commendation; — it is tried when he sees that a man of merit has prospered in an enterprise in which *he* has failed, or when he is called upon for the magnanimity to acknowledge one who, though below him in general character, is still his superior in this particular respect; — it is when, in some individual instance, this competitor has promoted the public good by a means

which *he* had declared to be totally inapplicable to the end.

The true Christian will be humble in proportion to the splendour of his endowments. Humility does not require him to stupefy or disavow his understanding, and thus disqualify or indispose him for great active duties. If he possesses talents, he is not unconscious of them; but, instead of exulting in the possession, he is abased that he has not turned them to better account, he is habitually thinking how he can most essentially serve God with his own gift. Sensible that he owes every thing to his divine Benefactor, he feels that he has not made him the return to which he was bound, and that his gratitude bears little proportion to his mercies; so that the very review of his abilities and possessions, which inflates the hearts of others, only deepens his humility, only fills his mind with a fuller sense of his own defect of love and thankfulness. Every distinction, instead of intoxicating him, only augments his sense of dependence, magnifies his weight of obligation, increases his feeling of accountableness. His humility has a double excitement: — he receives every blessing as the gift of God through the merits of his Son; it is increased by the reflection, that such is his unworthiness, he dares not even supplicate the mercy of his Creator but through the intercession of a Mediator. "Where is boasting then? it is excluded."

Not only on account of any good he may have, but also on account of evils from which he has been preserved, he acknowledges himself indebted to divine assistance; so that his escapes and deliverances, as well as his virtues and successes, are subjects of gratitude rather than of self-exaltation.

It will not be departing from the present object, if we contrast the quality under consideration with its opposite. While humility is never at variance with itself, pride is a very inconsistent principle. It knows not only how to assume the garb of the attribute to which it is opposed, but even descends to be abject, which humility never is. Consider it on one side, nothing is so self-supported; survey it on the other, you will perceive that nothing is so dependent, so full of claims, so exacting, so incapable of subsisting on itself. It is made up of extrinsic appendages; it leads a life of mendicity; it stoops to beg the alms of other men's good opinion for its daily bread. It is true, the happiness of a proud man, if he have rank, arises from an idea of his own importance; but still, to feed and maintain this greedy self-importance, he must look around him. His pleasures are derived, not so much from his personal enjoyments, as from his superiority to others; not so much from what he possesses, as from the respect his possessions inspire. As he cannot entirely support his feelings of greatness by

what he finds in himself, he supplies the deficiency by looking backward to his ancestors, and downward upon his train. With all his self-consequence, he is reduced to borrow his dignity from the merits of the one, and the numbers of the other. By thus multiplying himself, he feels not only individually, but numerically, great. These foreign aids and adjuncts help him to enlarge the space he fills in his own imagination, and he is meanly contented to be admired for what is, in effect, no part of himself. This sentiment is, however, by no means limited to rank or riches.

If the penury of pride drives it to seek its aliment in the praise of others, it is chiefly because we want their good opinion to confirm us in that which we have of ourselves. When we secretly indulge in reckoning up the testimonies we have collected to our worth, it is because we like to bring as many witnesses as we can muster, that we may have their approving verdict in additional proof that our own judgment was right. In fact, we think better of ourselves in proportion as we contrive to make more people think well of us. But, however large the circle which "high imaginations" draw round the individual self in the centre, we can really occupy no more than our allotted space; we may, indeed, change our position; but, in shifting it, we fill no more than we filled already, for by the removal we lose as much as we gain.

It is a humbling truth, that the most powerful talents are not seldom accompanied with vehement passions, that a brilliant imagination is too frequently associated with ungoverned appetites. Neither human reason, nor motives merely moral, are commonly found to keep these impetuous usurpers in order; the strength of men's passions tempting them to violate the rules which the strength of their judgment has laid down. Nature cannot operate without its own sphere. What is natural in the intellect, will not, of itself, govern what is natural in the appetite. If the lower part of our nature is subdued, it is not without the Holy Spirit assisting the higher. Wit, especially, has such a tendency to lead astray the mind which it embellishes, that it is a striking evidence of the efficacy of grace, when men, whose shining talents make virtue lovely in the eyes of others, reject themselves, "high thoughts engendering pride;" when they, on whose lips the attention of others hangs with delight, can, themselves, by this divinely infused principle, "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

There is no quality so ready to suspect, and so prompt to accuse, as that which we are considering; there is no fault which a proud man so readily charges upon others as pride; especially if the person accused possess those distinctions and accomplishments, the possession of which would make the accuser proud. Men full

of themselves are disposed to fancy others deficient in attention to them; and as it never occurs to them why those attentions are withheld, they have no other way of accounting for the neglect, but to charge the neglecter with being envious of their qualities, or vain of his own. With that deep humility, which is the groundwork of his profession, the Christian alone attains to real dignity of character. If we reckon those men great who rise high, and make a distinguished figure in the world, how much higher is his claim to greatness who looks down on what the others glory in, who views with indifference the things to which the world accounts it greatness to aspire, and the consummation of greatness to attain?

The proud man, by not cordially falling in with the Christian scheme — which, if he thoroughly adopted, would shrink to nothing these bloated fancies — contracts, in effect, the duration of his existence, and reduces to almost nothing the sphere in which his boasted dignity is to be exercised. The theatre on which he is satisfied to act is limited to the narrow stage of this world; and even on this vanishing scene, how far are the generality from being considerable actors! Pride, therefore, is something worse than fatuity, for whether the stake be high or low, it is sure to play a losing game. It is difficult to say which lot will be most terrible; his, who, having performed an obscure and

painful part in this short drama, and having neglected to seek that kingdom promised to the poor in spirit, closes his life and hopes together; or his, who, having had a conspicuous part assigned him here, submits, when the curtain drops, not merely to be nothing; but, oh! how much worse than nothing! Absorbed in the illusions and decorations of this shifting spectacle, or intoxicated with the plaudits of the spectators, the interminable scenes which lie beyond the grave, though perhaps not absolutely disbelieved, have been totally neglected to be taken into his brief reckoning.

Now, if pride were really a generous principle, if its tumour were indeed greatness, surely the soul which entertains it would exert its energies on a grander scale! If ambition were indeed a noble sentiment, would it not be pointed to the noblest objects; would it not be directed to the sublimest end? Would not the mind which is filled with it achieve a loftier flight? Would it stoop to be cooped up within the scanty precincts of a perishing world? True ambition would raise its votary above the petty projects which every accident may overturn, and every breath destroy; which a few months *may*, and a few years *must*, terminate. It would set him upon reflecting, that all the elevation of intellect, all the depth of erudition, all the superiority of rank, all the distinction of riches, is only held by the attenuated thread that attaches

him to this world — a world which is itself "hung upon nothing." True ambition would instruct him, that he is not really great who is not great for eternity — that to know the height and depth, the length and breadth, of the knowledge of God, and of his eternal love in Christ Jesus, is the consummation of all knowledge, the top of all greatness, the substance of all riches, the sum of all wisdom; that the only object sufficiently capacious to satisfy the grasping desires, to fill the hungering soul of man, is that immortality which is brought to light by the Gospel. That state which has God for its portion, and eternity for its duration, is alone commensurate to the grandeur of a soul redeemed by the blood of Christ. This holy ambition would show him, that there is a littleness in whatever has boundaries — a penury in every thing of which we can count the value — an insignificance in all, of which we perceive the end.

Let it, then, ever be considered as a destitution of true greatness, practically to blot out eternity from its plan. As a conseqnence, let that be truly designated "the wisdom from above," which makes eternity the grand feature in the aspect of our existence. And this ambition, be it remembered, is the exclusive property of the humble Christian. *His* desires are illimitable — *he* disdains the scanty bounds of time — *he* leaps the narrow confines of space. He it is who monopolises ambition. *His* aims

soar a bolder flight — *his* aspirations are sustained on a stronger pinion — *his* views extend to an immeasurable distance — *his* hopes rest in an interminable duration.

Yet if his felicity does not, like that of secular ambition, depend on popular breath, still it subsists on dependence. It subsists upon a trust which never disappoints — upon a mercy which is never exhausted — upon a promise which never deceives — upon the strength of an arm which "scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts" — on a benignity which "exalteth the meek and humble" — on a liberality, which, in opposition to worldly generosity, "fills the hungry alone with good things," and which, contrary to human vanity, sends only "the rich empty away."

Humility is an attribute of such antipathy to the original constitution of our nature, that no principle can possibly produce it in its full extent, and bring it to its complete maturity, but that of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. No spirit short of this can enable us to submit our understanding, to subdue our will, to resign our independence, to renounce ourselves.

This principle not only teaches us to bow to the authority and yield to the providence of God, but inculcates the still harder lesson of submitting to be saved in the only way He has appointed — a way which lays pride in the dust. If even, in the true servants of God, this sub-

mission is sometimes interrupted — if we too naturally recede from it — if we too reluctantly return to it — it is still owing to the remains of pride, the master sin; a sin too slowly discarded even from the renewed nature. This partial conquest of the stubborn will, this imperfect resignation, this impeded obedience, even in the real Christian, is an abiding proof that we want farther humbling, a mortifying evidence, that our hearts are not yet completely brought under the dominion of our principles.

## CHAP. XIV.

### ON RETIREMENT.

An old French wit says, that "ambition itself might teach us to love retirement, as there is nothing which so much hates to have companions." Cowley corrects this sentiment with one equally lively and more sound, that "ambition, indeed, detests to have company on either side, but delights above all things in a train behind, and ushers before." To seek, therefore, a retreat till we have got rid of this ambition, to fly to retirement as a scene of pleasure or improvement, till the love of the world is eradicated from the heart; or at least till this eradication is its predominant desire, will only conduct the discontented mind to a long train of fresh disappointments, in addition to that series of vexations of which it has so constantly complained in the world.

The amiable writer already referred to, who has as much unaffected elegance and good sense in his prose works, as false taste and unnatural wit in his poetry, seems not to be quite accurate when he insists in favour of his beloved solitude, that "a minister of state has not so much business in public as a wise man

has in private; the one," says he, "has but part of the affairs of one nation, the other has all the works of God and nature under his consideration." But surely there is a manifest difference between our having great works under our consideration, and having them under our controul. He assigns, indeed, high motives for the purposes of retreat, but he does not seem to assign the highest. Should he not have added, in conjunction with the objects he enumerates, what should be the leading object of the retirement of the good man, the study of his own heart, as well as of inanimate nature; of the word, as well as of the works of God?

He who has spent his life in the study of mankind, till he is weary both of the study and of its object, will with a justly framed mind be well prepared for retirement. He will delight in it as an occasion for cultivating a more intimate acquaintance with his Maker and with himself. He will seek it not merely as the well-earned reward of a life of labour, but as a scene, which, while it advances his present comfort, furnishes him with better means for preparing for a better life. We often hear of the necessity of being qualified for the world; and this is the grand object in the education of our children, overlooking the difficult duty of qualifying them for retirement. But if part of the immense pains which are taken to fit them for the company of others, were employed in fitting

them for their own company, in teaching them the duties of solitude as well as of society, this earth would be a happier place than it is; a training suitable to a world of such brief duration would be a better preparatory study for a world which will have no end.

*Leisure with dignity* is a classic phrase which carries to the taste and to the heart the mingled ideas of repose, elegance, and literature. It is, indeed, an honourable state of enjoyment. It has been sung by the poet, and extolled by the philosopher. Its delights have been echoed by those who seek it, and by those that shun it; by those who desire its possession, and by those who are satisfied with its praise; by those who found their fondness on a happy experience, and by those who had rather admire than enjoy it.

Tumult, indeed, is to be avoided as a great impediment to that interior peace, without which outward stillness is of little value. But let us bear in mind that it is more easy to escape from the tumult of the world than of the passions. Before, therefore, we expect immunity from care in our projected retreat, let us inquire what is our object in retiring. We may deceive ourselves in this pursuit as we have done in others. We may fancy we are retiring from motives of religion, when we are only seeking a more agreeable mode of life. Or we may be flying from duty, when we fancy we are flying from temptation. We may flatter ourselves we

are seeking the means of piety, when we are only running away from the perplexities of our situation; from trials which make, perhaps, a part of our duty. To dislike these is natural; to desire to escape from them is innocent, generally laudable. Only let us not persuade ourselves that we are influenced by one motive when we are acting from another. The design may be even good, but let us not deceive ourselves with the idea of its being better than it is. Let us not boast that we are making a sacrifice to duty, when we are consulting, however innocently, our own ease or convenience. In retreating into the country for peace of mind, the temper you would find you must carry thither. Those who retire on no other principle but to escape trouble without turning their leisure to the benefits it is calculated to impart, are happy only on the low condition of being useless. If we retire upon the motive of "Soul, take thine ease," though neither covetousness nor sensuality be the promoting principle, if our object be a slothful indulgence, a retirement which does not involve benefit to others, as well as improvement to ourselves, we fail of the great purpose for which we came into the world, for which we withdraw from it.

But while we advert to the highest object as the best, we are far from insinuating that the taste, especially so right a taste, may not be in-

dulged from motives of an inferior nature; far from thinking that we are not justified in preferring a tranquil to a bustling scene, and adopting a more rational, even if it be not a more religious, plan of life. There is something almost like virtue in the good taste which prefers it; only, that as in intellectuals, good taste must have its substratum in good sense, so in morals it should have its substratum in principle. But if any one thinks that merely by retiring from the world, he shall get rid of his own evil tempers, solitude is the worst choice he could make. It may, indeed, through the grace of God, be made eventually beneficial: for though his interior burden, so far from being lightened, will be more oppressively felt, yet its very oppressiveness, by leading him to look into the cause, may lead to its removal; he may be drawn to religion to get rid of himself, as he was driven to retirement to get rid of his cares.

No second causes act but by the direction of the first. The visible works of God, though so admirably calculated to stir up devotion in the heart, have not commonly, especially when habit makes them familiar, been found to produce this effect. Some of the school divines made a just distinction, when they compared inanimate and intelligent beings, in reference to the supreme Creator, by saying, that the one only exhibit the footsteps of God, while the other represent his face.

It was worthy of the munificence of omnipotent Bounty, not only to spread the earth with a rich profusion of whatever is necessary and pleasant to animal life, but with whatever might invite to contemplative and intellectual life; not only to sustain but to gratify; not only to nourish but to improve: by endless variety, awakening curiosity, and by curiosity, exciting research. The country is favourable to the study of natural history; furnishing both the leisure and the materials. It sets the mind upon thinking, that if the objects of God's creation are so wonderful, *Himself how wondrous then!*

The mind, indeed, which is looking out for good, finds "sermons in stones, and good in every thing." To minds of an opposite make, use destroys the effect, even if novelty had produced it. Little habituated to reflection, they soon learn to behold a grove of oaks with no higher feeling than a street of shops; and are as little soothed with the murmurs of a rivulet, as with the clatter of hackney coaches. Where sloth predominates in the character, we are disposed to consider the retreat from which we had promised ourselves so much advantage, as furnishing a refuge for idleness rather than a place for reflection. If vanity and vivacity predominate, we shall value the loveliest scenery we have been embellishing, rather as means to attract company and commendation, than as a

help to assist our better thoughts, and lift our hearts to holy aspirations.

Though piety is no local thing, yet it has locality. That being is but a bad authority whom Milton makes proudly to exclaim, "The mind is its own place," and the Stoics carried their haughty mental independence too far, in asserting that local circumstances made no difference in the condition of man. Retirement is assuredly favourable to the advancement of the best ends of our being. There the soul has freer means of examining into its own state, and its dependence upon God. It has more unobstructed leisure for enjoying with its Maker,

> Communion sweet, communion large and high.

It has ampler means for reiterating the consecration of its powers and faculties to Him who gave them, than it could easily find in those broken snatches and uncertain intervals which busier scenes afforded. But then we must be brought into a state and condition to reap benefit from retreat. The paralytic might as reasonably expect to remove his disease by changing his position, as the discontented to allay the unruly motions of a distempered mind merely by retiring into the country.

A great statesman, whom many of us remember, after having long filled a high official situation with honour and ability, began at length impatiently to look forward to the happy period

when he should be exonerated from the toils of office. He pathetically lamented the incessant interruptions which distracted him, even in the intervals of public business. He repeatedly expressed to a friend of the Author, how ardently he longed to be discharged from the oppressive weight of his situation, and to consecrate his remaining days to repose and literature. At length one of those revolutions in party, which so many desire, and by which so few are satisfied, transferred him to the scene of his wishes. He flew to his rural seat, but he soon found that the sources to which he had so long looked, failed in their power of conferring the promised enjoyment; his ample park yielded him no gratification but what it had yielded him in town, without the present drawback; there he had partaken of its venison without the incumbrance of its solitude. His Hamadryads, having no despatches to present, and no votes to offer, soon grew insipid. The stillness of retreat became insupportable: and he frankly declared to the friend above alluded to, that such was to him the blank of life, that the only relief he ever felt was to hear a rap at the door. Though he had before gladly snatched the little leisure of a hurried life for reading, yet when life became all leisure, books had lost their power to interest. Study could not fill a mind long kept on the stretch by great concerns in which he himself had been a prime mover. The history of

other times could not animate a spirit habitually quickened by a strong personal interest in actual events. — There is a quality in our nature strongly indicative that we were formed for active and useful purposes. These, though of a calmer kind, may be still pursued in retirement under the influence of the only principle powerful enough to fill the heart which fancies itself emptied of the world. Religion is that motive yet quieting principle, which alone delivers a man from perturbation in the world, and inanity in retirement; without it, he will in the one case be hurried into impetuosity, or in the other be sunk into stagnation. But religion long neglected "will not come when you do call for it." Perhaps the noble person did not call.

It is an obvious improvement in the taste and virtue of the present day, that so many of our dictators retire, not to the *turf*, but to the *plough;* that they make an honourable and pleasant exchange of the cares and vexations of political life for the tranquil and useful pursuits of agriculture. Such pursuits yield comparative repose, and produce positive good. Besides this, the modern Cincinnatus will have the gratification of finding how much he has gained by the change in his choice of instruments, for he will see that "all sheep and oxen, yea and all beasts of the field," are far less perverse, faithless, and intractable than the indocile human agents

whom he has been so long labouring to break in, and bring under the yoke.

But whatever he may have gained in these respects, if the philosophical and political agriculturist do not make it part of his arrangement, as we hope he does, that the cultivation of personal piety shall divide his time and his thoughts with the cultivation of his paternal acres, he will not find his own passions more tractable, his own appetites more subdued, his own tempers better regulated, because the theatre in which they are exercised is changed from contentious senates to blooming meadows. There is no power in the loveliest scenery to give that character to the mind on which its peace depends. It is true his innocent occupations will divert ambition, but it requires a more powerful operation to cure it. Ambition is an intermittent: it may, indeed, be cooled, but without piety it will be cooled as the patient in an ague is cooled "in the well day between the two fits," he will be looking back on the fever he has escaped, and forward to that which he is anticipating. There is but one tonic powerful enough to prevent the return of the paroxysm. He will find the perusal of the Bible not less compatible than that of the Georgics with his interesting occupation. While he is actually enjoying the lovely living images under which the inspired writers represent the most delightful truths of religion, he may realise the analogies

intellectually, he may be, indeed, conducted "to green pastures," and led beside "the still waters of comfort," in the highest sense of those beautiful metaphors.

What a blessing is it to mankind, when they, whose large domains confer on them such extensive local influence, give their views a wider range, and take in an ampler compass of beneficial patronage; when they crown their exertions for the public good by the pious education of their young dependents, by promoting the growth of Christianity as assiduously as the breed of sheep; by extending the improvement of the soil to the moral cultivation of those whom Providence, having committed to their protection for that very purpose, will require it at their hands.

With the deepest gratitude to God, let it be observed how many of these great persons, with a spirit more honourable to them than their coronets or any earthly distinction, have stood forward as the avowed patrons of the noble Institution for dispersing the Bible into all countries, after having transfused it into every dialect of every language. When we consider the object, and view the rapidity, and trace the success, are we not almost tempted to fancy that we see the Angel in the Revelation flying in the midst of heaven, carrying "the everlasting Gospel to preach unto them that dwell in the earth

and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people?"*

It is, indeed, a spectacle to warm the coldest and to soften the hardest heart, to behold men of the first rank and talents, statesmen who have never met but to oppose each other, orators who have never spoken but to differ, each strenuous in what it is presumed he believes right, renouncing every interfering interest, sacrificing every jarring opinion, forgetting all in which they differed, and thinking only on that in which

* May an old and attached member of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge be allowed to offer her opinion (though irrelevant to the subject of this chapter), upon the complete establishment of the argument in favour of the Bible Society, from its not injuring its venerable predecessor? It is now obvious, that the benefits of the new institution are effected without detriment to the old, from its having excited fresh friends to its cause, and raised additional funds for its support. Reasoning indeed from analogy, would the benefactor, whose means were competent to both, refuse his patronage to the Middlesex Hospital because he was already a subscriber to St. George's? When he saw that other contributors neither withdrew nor diminished, but especially when he saw that they augmented, their bounty to the elder establishment, would he not bid God speed to the younger? Would he not rejoice that a new source was opened for healing *more* diseases, for relieving *more* wants? In the distribution of the Bible, are not both institutions streams issuing from the same fountain of love, both flowing into the same ocean of good? If we may be allowed the application, "they are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit;" "they are differences of administration, but it is the same God that worketh all in all."

they agree; each *reconciled to his brother, and leaving his gift at the altar*, offering up every resentment at the foot of the Cross! There might be two opinions how men should be governed, there can be but one — whether they should be saved.

We ought not to doubt that a portion of that generous zeal with which they disseminate the word of life to others, will be exerted in increasing their own personal acquaintance with it. To dispense the grand instrument of salvation to others, forgetful of our own interest in it, is one of the few instances in which disinterestedness would be criminal; while here, to participate in the blessing we bestow, is one of the rare occasions in which self-love is truly honourable. May we, without offence, without the remotest idea of any thing personal, hazard the observation, that it is possible to be made the instrument, not only of temporal, but eternal, good to others, without reaping ourselves any advantage from the good we communicate?

It might have supplied a thesis for disputation among the whimsical subtleties of the old school divines, which was the more blamable extreme, to possess the Bible ourselves without imparting the blessing to others, or to communicate it to them without using it ourselves. Unfortunately, however, this cause for casuistry was cut short, by their refusing the Bible altogether to the laity.

It is with reluctance we turn from subjects of grateful panegyric to those presented to us by the same class of society for animadversion. With regret we take leave of scenes enriched and dignified by the beneficial presence and exertions of their lords, for the dreary prospect of deserted mansions and abdicated homes. To not a few of the rich and great, their magnificent houses are rather a cumbrous appendage of grandeur, places to which strangers resort to admire the splendour of the proprietors, and the portraits of their ancestors, than what Providence intended, a rich additional ingredient in their own overflowing cup of blessings. Their seats are possessed without being enjoyed. They appear, indeed, to combine the advantages of retreat with those of opulence. But it is only appearance. Do not too many of their owners strive to dispossess the scene of every attribute appended to it? Do they not chiefly derive what little they know of the charms of the country from the descriptions of the poet — of the diversities of landscape from the painters of the opera-scenes — of the delights of retirement from the moralist, the philosopher, and, more frequently, the novelist? They contrive to transfer to their rural abodes every thing of the metropolis, except its buildings, and to the metropolis, every movable appendage of rural beauty. Like the imperial Roman glutton,

who never tasted fish but at the farthest possible distance from the sea, they enjoy the lovely products of the conservatory glowing with every hue, and breathing every fragrance, any where but where they grow. The most exquisite flowers yield little delight till transported to the town residence. There they exhale their sweets amid smoky lamps, and waste them on a fetid atmosphere; exhausting their beauties in the transient festivity of a single night, instead of reserving them to decorate retreat, and add one attraction more to the charms of home and the pleasures of retirement.

With these personages, the principal change from town to country consists in the difference between a park and a square. They bring to one the same tastes, the same amusements, and the same inversion of hours which they adopt in the other. They lose the true enjoyment of both, by contriving that neither town nor country shall preserve any distinct character of its own. To some, indeed, the splendid inheritance is considered as little more than a commodious inn in which to repose in their incessant migration from the capital to the watering-place, and from the chalybeate to the sea; without having the too valid plea of attending the sick, or being sick themselves.

But if we compare the domestic scenes from which they are hurrying, with the places to

which they are resorting, we are inclined to pity them on the score of taste, as much as on the loss of enjoyment. A stranger to our manners, who had heard of the self-denial which our religion enjoins, when he compared what they had quitted with what they are flying to, would naturally compliment them on the noble sacrifice which he would conclude they had made to duty. He would admire the zeal which prompted the abandonment of such pure for such turbid pleasures; he would admire the elevation of mind which could submit to such unimposed penance. When he followed them from the splendid mansion to the close and incommodious residence, in which a crowded season sometimes immures the possessors of palaces; when he saw them renounce their blooming gardens, their stately woods, "trees worthy of Paradise," for unshaded walks or artificial awnings; their bowers and temples for the unsheltered beach, open to all the rage of the dog-star; the dry, smooth-shaven green, for sinking sands rivalling the soil of Arabia, or burning gravel, which might emulate Queen Emma's ploughshares, would he not exclaim in rapture, surely these heroic ladies submit to such privations, encounter such hardships, make such renunciations, from motives of the most sublime self-denial! Doubtless they crowd to these joyless abodes, because they could find at home no distresses to be relieved, no inno-

cence to be protected, no wrongs to be redressed, no ignorance to be instructed. Now, would he exultingly add, I have some practical experience of the sacrifices of which disinterested piety is capable. The good they must be doing here is indeed a noble recompense for the pleasures they are giving up.

Unimportant as this gradual revolution in our habits may be thought, there are few things which have more contributed to lower the tone both of society and solitude, than these multiplied and ever-multiplying scenes of intermediate and subordinate dissipation. When the opulent divided the year between the town and country residence — the larger portion always assigned to the latter — being stationary in each, as they occupied a post of more obvious responsibility, they were more likely to fulfil their duties, than in these parentheses between both. For these places, to persons who only seek them as scenes of diversion and not as recruits to health, are considered as furnishing a sort of suspension from duty as well as an exoneration from care; the chief value of the pleasures they afford consisting in their not being *home-made.*

We have little natural relish for serious things. It is one great aim of religion to cure this natural malady. It is the great end of dissipated pleasures to inflame it. These pleasures forcibly address themselves to the senses, and

thus not only lower the taste, but nearly efface the very idea of spiritual things. They gradually persuade their votaries, that nothing but what they receive through *their* medium is real. Where the illusions of sense are allowed to make their full impression, the pleasures of religion appear merely visionary; faint shadows at first, and afterwards unexisting things.

If religion makes out certain pleasures to be dangerous, these pleasures revenge themselves in their turn by representing religion to be dull. They are adopted under the specious notion of being a relief from more severe employments; whereas others less poignant would answer the end better, and exhaust the spirits less. If the effect of certain diversions only serves to render our return to sober duties more reluctant, and the duties themselves insipid, if not irksome — if we return to them as to that which, though we do not love, we dare not omit, it is a question even in the article of enjoyment, whether we do not lose more than we gain by any recreation which has the effect of rendering that disgusting which might otherwise have been delightful.

But it is never too late for a change of system, provided that change is not only *intended*, but *adopted*. We would respectfully invite those who have been slaves to custom, courageously to break their chain. Let them earnestly solicit the aid which is from above on their own honest exertions. Let them tear themselves

from the fascinating objects which have hitherto detained them from making acquaintance with their own hearts. It is but to submit heroically to a little dulness at first, which habit will convert into pleasure, to encounter temptation with a resistance which will soon be rewarded with victory. They will be sensible of one surprising revolution; from the period when they begin to inure themselves to their own company, they will insensibly dislike it less, not so much for the goodness they will find in themselves, as from discovering what a fund of interesting employment, of which they had been so long in search, their own hearts can furnish.

As the scrutiny becomes deeper, the improvement will become greater, till they will grow not so much to endure retirement as to rejoice in it; not so much to subsist without dissipation as to soar above it. If they are not so much diverted, they will be less discomposed. If there are fewer vanities to amuse, there will be fewer disorders to repair; there will be no longer that struggle between indulgence and regret, between enjoyment and repentance, between idleness and conscience, which distracts many amiable, but unfixed minds, who feel the right which they have not courage to pursue. There will be fewer of those inequalities which cost more pain in filling up than they afforded pleasure in creating. In their habits there will be regularity, without monotony. There will be a

uniform beauty in the even tissue of life; the web, though not so much spangled, will be more of a piece: if it be less glittering in patches, the design will be more elegant; if the colours are less glaring, they will wear better; their soberness will secure their permanence; if they are not gaudy when new, they will be fresh to the end.

## CHAP. XV.

### DANGERS AND ADVANTAGES OF RETIREMENT.

If some prefer retirement as an emancipation from troublesome duties rather than as a scene of improvement, others choose it as a deliverance from restraint, and as the surest mode of indulging their inclinations by a life of freedom; not a freedom from the dangers of the world, but of following their own will. While we continue in the active world, while our idleness is animated with bustle, decorated with splendour, and diversified with variety, we cheer our erroneous course with the promise of some day escaping from it; but when we sit down in our retreat, unprovided with the well-chosen materials of which true enjoyment is alone compounded, or without proposing to dedicate our retirement to the obtaining them, we are almost in a more hopeless condition than when we lived without reflection in the world. We were then looking forward to the privacy we now enjoy, as to a scene of mental profit. We had in prospect a point, which, if ever attained, would be to us the beginning of a new life, a post from

which we should start in a nobler race. But the point is attained, and the end is neglected. We are set down in our ultimate position.

But retirement, from which we promised ourselves so much, has produced no change, except from the idleness of tumult to that of ennui in one sex, and from levity to apathy in the other. The active life which we had promised to turn into contemplative life is no improvement, if a gay frivolity is only transformed into a dull vacuity. In the world we were not truly active if we did little good; in retirement we are not contemplative, if contemplation is not exercised to the best purposes. It is in vain that we retire from great affairs, if our hearts are stuffed with such as are insignificant. There is less hope of a change in the mind, because there is no probability of a change in the circumstances with which this projected moral alteration used to be connected. Where the outset was froth, and the end is feculence, there may be a difference, but there is no improvement. We shall find in retirement, under new modifications, the same passions, tempers, and weaknesses, which we had proposed to leave behind us, without the same pretence of wanting time to watch against them. If we settle down in petty systematic trifling, it is not the size of the concern, but the spirit in which it is pursued, that makes the difference. The scandal of a village, the intrigues of a little provincial town, may be entered into

with as much warmth, and as little profit, as the more imposing follies of the metropolis.

Retirement, therefore, though so favourable to virtue, is not without its dangers. Taste, and, of course, conversation, is liable to degenerate. Intellect is not kept in exercise. We are too apt to give to insignificant topics an undue importance; to become arbitrary; to impose our opinions as laws; to contract, with a narrowness of thinking, an impatience of opposition. Yet while we grow peremptory in our decisions, we are, at the same time, liable to individual influence; whereas, in the world, the injurious influence of one counsellor is soon counteracted by that of another; and if, from the collision of opposite sentiments, we do not strike out truth, we experience, at least, the benefit of contradiction. If those with whom we associate are of an inferior education and cast of manners, we shall insensibly lower our standard, thinking it sufficiently high, if it be above theirs, till we imperceptibly sink to their level. The author saw, very early in life, an illustration of these remarks, in a person who had figured in the ranks of literature. He was a scholar and a poet. Disappointed in his ambitious views of rising in the church, a profession for which he was little calculated, he took refuge in a country-parsonage. Here he affected to make his fate his choice. On Sundays he shot over the heads of the inferior part of his audience, without touch-

ing the hearts of the better informed; and, during the week, paid himself for the world's neglect by railing at it. He grew to dislike polished society, for which he had been well qualified. He spent his mornings in writing elegies on the contempt of the world, or odes on the delights of retirement, and his evenings in the lowest sensuality with the most vulgar and illiterate of his neighbours.

Another danger is that of aspiring to become the sun of our little system, since the love of popularity is not exclusively attached to public situations. In the world, indeed, if there be not a real, there must at least be a spurious merit to procure it, whereas, when there are no competitors, it is easy to be popular; to be admired by the uncultivated, and flattered by the dependent, may be the attainment of the most moderately gifted. Let us not, therefore, judge of ourselves by acclamations, which would equally follow the worthless, if they filled the same situation. If we do not remember to distinguish between our merit and our place, we shall receive the homage, not as a debt of gratitude or a bait for bounty, but as a tribute to excellence. From being accustomed to flattery, we shall exact it as a right; from not being opposed, we shall learn not to endure opposition.

Besides the danger of contracting supercilious habits if surrounded with inferiors, there is also that of indulging a censorious spirit on com-

paring our own habits with those of persons who live in the world, and of over-rating our own exemption from practices to which, from indolence, we have no inducement, and, from circumstances, no opportunity. When we compare our hearts and lives with those of whom we know little, let us not forget to compare also, with others, our situations and temptations. The comparative estimates we make in our own favour are frequently fallacious, always dangerous. Many who live in the world have a mortified spirit, while others may bring to a cloister hearts overflowing with the love of that world from which it is easier to turn our faces than to withdraw our affections.

Secluded persons are sometimes less careful to turn to profit small parcels of time, which, when put together, make no inconsiderable fund. Reckoning that they have an indefinite stock upon hand, they neglect to devote each portion to its definite purpose. The largeness of their treasure makes them negligent of small, but incessant, expenses. For instance; instead of light reading being used as a relief from severer studies, and better employments, it is too frequently resorted to as the principal expedient for getting over the tediousness of solitude: people slide into the indulgence to such an excess, that it becomes no longer the relaxation, but the business. The better studies, which were only to be relieved, are superseded; they

become dull and irksome; what was once a pleasure is converted into a dry duty, and the duty is become a task. From this plenitude of leisure, there is also a danger of falling into general remissness. Business which may be done at any time, is, for that very reason, not done at all. The belief that we shall have opportunities enough to repair an omission, causes omissions to be multiplied.

From the *dangers* of retirement, we come now to the more pleasant topic of its *advantages*. The retired man cannot even pretend that his character must of necessity be melted down in the general mass, or cast into the general mould. He, at least, may think for himself, may form his own plans, keep his own hours, and, with little intermission, pursue his own projects. He is less enslaved to the despotism of custom, less driven about by the absurd fluctuations of fashion. His engagements and their execution depend more immediately on himself; his understanding is left unfettered, and he has less pretence for screening himself under the necessity of falling in with the popular habits when they militate against convenience and common sense.

Many of the duties of retirement are more fixed and certain, more regular in their recurrence, and obvious as to their necessity. As they are less interrupted, the neglect of them is less excusable. In the world, events and en-

gagements succeed each other with such rapidity and pressure, that the imagination has hardly time or incitement to exercise itself. Where all is interruption or occupation, fancy has little leisure to operate. But if, in retirement, where this faculty finds full leisure both for exercise and for chastisement; if the undisciplined mind is left entirely at its mercy, the guilt will be enhanced, and the benefit lost; it will be ever foraging for prey, and, like other marauders, instead of stopping to select, will pick up all the plunder that falls in its way, and bring in a multitude of vain thoughts to feed upon, as an indemnification for the realities of which it is deprived. The well-regulated mind, in the stated seasons devoted to the closet, should therefore severely discipline this vagrant faculty. They who do not make a good use of *these* seasons of retirement, will not be likely to make a good use of the rest. The hour of prayer or meditation is a consecration of the hours employed in the business, whether of society or solitude. In those hours we may lay in a stock of grace, which, if faithfully improved, will shed its odour on every portion of the day.

If general society contribute more to smooth the asperities of manner, to polish roughnesses, and file off sharpnesses, retirement furnishes better means for cultivating that piety which is the only genuine softener of the temper. Without this corrective, even the manners may grow

austere, and the language harsh. But while the benevolent affections are kept in exercise, and the kindly offices of humanity in operation, there will be little danger that the mind will become rough and angular from the want of perpetual collision with polished bodies. The exercise of beneficence, too, in the country is accompanied with more satisfaction, as the good done is less equivocal. In great cities, and especially in the metropolis, some charitable persons chiefly content themselves with promoting public subscriptions, and superintending public charities, for want of knowing the actual degree of individual distress, or the truth of private representation. Here all the advantage lies on the side of the country-resident. The characters, as well as wants, of the poor are specifically known, and certainly the immediate vicinity of the opulent has the more natural, though not the sole claim, to their bounty.

Retirement is calculated to cure the great infirmity, I had almost said the mortal disease, of not being able to be alone ; it is adapted to relieve the wretched necessity of perpetually hanging on others for amusement; it delivers us from the habit of depending, not only for our solace, but almost for our existence, on foreign aid, and extricates us from the bondage of submitting to any sort of society in order to get rid of ourselves. It is very useful sometimes thus to make experiments on our own minds, to strip

ourselves of helps and supports, to cut off whatever is extrinsic, and, as it were, to be reduced to ourselves. We should thus learn to do without persons and things, even while we have them, that we may not feel the privation too strongly when they are not to be had. These self-denials constitute the true legitimate self-love, as the multiplying of indulgences is the surest way to mortification.

Those to whom change is remedy, and novelty gratification, though the change be for the worse, and the novelty be a loss, are the first to bewail the disappointment which every one else foresaw. We hear those complain most that they can get no quiet, whose want of it arises from the irruptions of their own passions. Peace is no local circumstance. It does not depend on the situation of the house, but of the heart. True quiet is only to be found in the extirpation of evil tempers, in the victory over unruly appetites; it is found, not merely in the absence of temptation, but in the dominion of religion. It arises from the cultivation of that principle, which alone can effectually smooth down the swellings of pride, still the restlessness of envy, and calm the turbulence of impure desires. It depends on the submission of the will, on that peace of God which passeth all understanding, on the grace of Christ, on the consolations of the spirit. With these blessings, which are promised to all who seek them, we may find tran-

quillity in Cheapside; without them, we may live a life of tumult on the Eddystone.

Those who are more conversant with poetic than pious composition; who have fed their fancy with the soothing dreams of pastoral bards; who figure to themselves a state of pure felicity among the guileless beings with whom a fond imagination peoples the scenes of rural life, expect, when they retire into the country, to meet with a new race of mortals, pure as the fabled inhabitants of the golden age — spotless beings, who were not included in the primeval curse — creatures who have not only escaped the contamination of the world, but the original infection of sin, that sin, which they allow may be caught by contact, but which they do not know is a home-born, home-bred disease. It is, indeed, a most engaging vision, to associate indivisibly with the lovely scenes of nature, the lovelier form of purity: but, alas! "such scenes were never!" The groves and lawns of the country no more make men necessarily virtuous, than the brick and mortar of the church make them necessarily pious. The enthusiast of nature, while he enjoys even to rapture her unpolluted charms, must not, however, expect to find in retirement that unsullied innocence which the disappointed Cowley looked for in his retreat at Chertsey; which, after his woful failure there, he continued to persuade himself he should find in America;

which his own Claudian vainly believed might be obtained by his interesting *Old Man of Verona*, on escaping from that city; which even the patriarch Lot found not in escaping from a worse city than Verona.

Perhaps the vivid imagination of Cowley, in his eager longings for America, like that of some more recent enthusiasts, might have been kindled by the alluring appellation of the *New* World. This seducing epithet might convey to his impressible mind the idea of something young, and original, and uncontaminate; something that might excite the notion, not of a new-found, but new-created world, fresh, and fair, and faultless. But even the disjunction of continents, which was then believed, produces no such distinction in the human character. The native evil pursues the man

Far as th' equator thrice to the utmost pole.

All experience, all history, especially that history which is supremely the record of truth, rouses us from the bewitching dream, and subverts the fair idea. It was in a garden, a garden, too, "chosen by the Sovereign Planter," that the first sin, the prolific seed of all subsequent offences, was committed. It was in a retirement more profound than any we can conceive, for it was in a world of which we know only of four inhabitants, and those of rural occupations, that the first dreadful breach of relative duties was

made; that the first murder, and that of the dearest connection, was perpetrated. And though the treason of Gethsemane was, in the divine counsels, overruled to repair the defection of Eden, yet, to show how little local circumstances influence action, and govern principle, a garden was the scene where that treason was accomplished.

God would not have provided so ill for the welfare of his creatures, who, from the constitution of their nature, could not have subsisted but in communities, if seclusion had been necessary to salvation. That it is the most favourable scene for the production of virtue and the promotion of piety we have fully admitted. In the world, temptations meet us at every corner. In retirement, it is we who make the advances. He who had tried the extremes of public and private life, who had been a shepherd and a king, and who knew the dangers of both conditions, has given no exclusive instructions to the cottage or the throne. He gives a general exhortation to "commune with our own hearts, and be still;" an injunction equally applicable to the sceptre and the crook; and, in his own case, he says, "I have poured out my heart by myself;" but neither is the injunction nor the example limited to the world or to retirement, for such pious practices equally belong to both. Yet it must be confessed he dwells on pastoral scenes and rural images with a fondness of

which no traces are to be found in his allusion to courts or cities.

But whether we are in public or in retired life, our inattention to the reason why we were sent into our present state is one grand cause of the miseries we endure in it. In the world, as we before observed, we are more governed by our senses; in solitude, by our imagination. Both have a tendency to mislead us. The latter tells us we were not sent into this state to suffer, but to enjoy; and the senses revolt at the sufferings which the imagination had not taught us to expect. To think of exempting ourselves from pain, instead of expecting it and preparing for it, is the common error of those who overlook or mistake the end of their being. In the hope of this exemption, we fly to one resource after another, thinking, that the ease which has hitherto eluded us is not attained only because we have not sought it in the right way; that *all* expedients have not yet been tried; that *all* resources are not yet exhausted. Thus we take fresh comfort from the persuasion, that if we have missed of happiness, it is not because happiness is not the proper state of mortal man, nor the prohibited condition of his being, but because we have erred in our pursuit, and shall still find it in the scheme we are next about to adopt.

A bad judgment contributes to our infelicity almost as much as bad dispositions. It is by

these false estimates of life that life is made unhappy. It is from expecting from any state more than it has to bestow, that so little is enjoyed in any. He who is discontented in retirement had perhaps previously amused his vacant hours in collecting all the possibilities of happiness; but had generally caught and fixed her most alluring image in that projected retirement for which his worldly indulgences were every day more disqualifying him.

Far be it from me to aim at inspiring disgust at human life, or any despair of the real happiness which is attainable in it. This attainment is a simple process: to contract our desires, that they may be always fewer than our wants; not to expect from this life more than God meant we should find in it. Neither to be governed by sense or fancy, but by the unerring word and will of God; to think constantly that the happiness of a Christian will always be more in hope than in possession; to remember that though deep and bitter sufferings are incident to our frame and state, yet the heaviest and the worst are those which *man* inflicts on man, or his own passions on himself; that we are only truly and irremediably unhappy when we fasten our desires on objects unsuitable or unattainable — objects neither commensurate to our higher nature, nor adapted to our future hope.

## CHAP. XVI.

### AN INQUIRY WHY SOME GOOD SORT OF PEOPLE ARE NOT BETTER.

THERE is a class of pleasing and amiable persons whom it would be difficult not to love, and unjust not to respect; but of whom, though candour obliges us to entertain a favourable hope, yet we are compelled to say, that their general conduct is rather blameless than excellent; their practice rather unoffending than exemplary; that their character rather exhibits a capacity for higher attainments, than any demonstration that such attainments are actually made.

These are the people who, from their sobriety of deportment and orderly habits, we should be naturally led to expect would make a great proficiency in religion. They are seldom hurried into irregularities; discretion is their cardinal virtue; they are frequently quoted as patterns of decorum; the finger of reproach can seldom be pointed at their conduct; that of ridicule, never. They are not seldom kind and humane, feeling and charitable; they fill many relative duties in a manner which might put to the blush not a

few, from whose higher profession better things might have been expected.

"You have sketched a perfect character," methinks I hear some angry reader exclaim. "What more does society demand? What more would the most correct man require in his son or his wife, his sister or his daughter?"

We are indeed most ready to allow, that few, comparatively, go so far; we grant that the world would be a much less disorderly and vexatious scene than it is, if the greater number reached these heights which we yet presume to consider as inadequate to the requisitions of the Gospel, as insufficient to answer the claims of Christianity. Would it not be a very melancholy consideration, if this most encouraging circumstance, of their being *not far* from the kingdom of God, should ever — which Heaven avert! — prove a possible reason for their not entering into it? if their being *almost* Christians, should be the very preventing cause of their becoming *altogether* such?

Their education has been governed rather by proprieties than principles. They have learned to disapprove of hardly any thing in the way of pleasure for its own sake, but highly to reprobate the extremes to which disorderly people carry it. They censure a thing not so much for being wrong in itself, as for being immoderate in the degree. They condemn all the improper practices against which the world sets its face,

but have not very distinct ideas of the right and the wrong in any thing which it tolerates. Religion, which has made a part of their early instruction, took its turn with the usual accomplishments, though subordinately with respect to the earnestness with which it was inculcated, and with about the same proportion of the time allotted to it, as minutes bear to hours. It was taught as a needful thing, but not as the *one* thing needful. Religion, however, continues to maintain its appropriate place in their reading, and, to a certain degree, to be adopted into their practice, bearing nearly the same proportion to other objects as it did when they were initiated into its elements. They were bred in its forms, and in its forms they persist to live, if the term *live* can be properly applied to any thing which is destitute of the characters and properties of life. They live, it is true, but it is as the vegetable world lives in the winter's frost, which does not indeed kill it, but benumbs its powers, and suspends its vitality.

They make a conscience of reading the Scriptures, but sometimes interpret them too much in their own favour, instead of judging of the duties they inculcate by such properties and results as they promise to produce. In making it their study, they neglect to make it their standard.

They deceive themselves on many points, by taking their measures from rules that are not legitimate. One makes his own taste and inclin-

ation his measure of practice, another the example of an accredited friend; almost all plead the dread of singularity, the vanity of opposing your judgment to that of the world, and the absurdity of setting up a standard which you know to be unattainable. If you censure the thoughtlessness of the dissipated, they censure it too; lamenting that there should ever be an abuse of things so innocent and lawful. If you represent the beauty of piety, they approve of every kind of excellence in the abstract, but when you appeal to particular instances, refer them to actual exemplifications, they intimate, that, in respect to whatever exceeds their own measure, it carries in it somewhat of assumption and pretence; or else they insinuate, that however proper the thing may be in the persons alluded to, *their* situation admits of an exemption: that what may be justifiable in others differently situated, would be objectionable under *their* circumstances. Thus we involve ourselves in the flimsy web of a delusive sophistry till the error becomes destructive before it is discerned.

Excess of every kind is what they carefully avoid; and excess in religion as much as in any other thing. Under this head they expunge zeal from their catalogue of virtues. The establishment of a correct character is their first object, and the good opinion of the world the instrument by which they establish it. This keeps their views low; though it costs as much

pains and precaution to keep up a high reputation on worldly grounds as it would to cultivate the principle itself, whose results would, in some respects, be nearly the same as what they are labouring to attain. *To be* the thing would be a shorter cut to comfort, than by incessant study and effort to keep up its appearance.

Propriety and order, virtues in themselves, obtain for them the reputation of still higher virtues; all that appears is so amiable, that the world readily gives them credit for qualities which are supposed to lie behind, and are only prevented by diffidence from appearing. They carry on with each other an intercourse of reciprocal, but measured flattery; this serves to promote kindness to each other, and esteem for themselves. Self-complacency is rather kept out of sight by the delicacy of good breeding, than subdued by religious conviction. They are rather governed by certain of the more sober worldly maxims, than by the strictness of Christian discipline. Though they fear sin, and avoid it, yet it is to be suspected they most carefully avoid those faults which are most disreputable, and that its impropriety has its full share in their abhorrence, with its turpitude.

As to religion, they rather respect, than love it. They seem to intimate, that there is something of irreverence in any familiarity with the subject, and place it at an awful distance, as a thing whose mysterious grandeur would be di-

minished by a too near approach. Another reason why they consider religion rather as an object of veneration than affection, is, because they erroneously conceive it to be an enemy to innocent pleasure.

If they are not perfectly good Christians, it is not because they are good Jews, for they do not "talk of the words" which were commanded under that dispensation, *when they sit in their house, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they rise up.* Religion engages their regard somewhat in the way in which the laws of the land engage it, as something sacred, from being established by custom and precedent; as a valuable institution for the preservation of the public good; but it does not interest their feelings; they do not consider it so much a thing of individual concern, as of general protection. Of its establishment by authority, they think more highly, than of its business with their own hearts; of its influence in maintaining general order, than of its efficacy in promoting in themselves peace and joy. In short, they carve out an image of religion not altogether unorthodox, but which, like the uninformed statue of the enamoured artist, though a beautiful figure, is without life, or power, or motion.

The more obvious duties being discharged, they are a little inclined to think, that too considerable a portion of their time and talents is left at their own disposal. Large intervals of

leisure are rather assumed to be a necessary repose and refreshment from right employments and benevolent actions, and as purchased by their performance, than as having any specific application of their own. In short, things which they call indifferent, make up too large a portion of their scheme of life, and in their distribution of time.

The class we are considering are apt to be very severe in their censures of those who have lost their reputation, while they are rather too charitable to those who only deserve to lose it. This excessive valuation of externals is not likely to be accompanied with great candour in judging of the discredited and the unfortunate. Errors which we ourselves have had no temptation to commit, we are too much disposed to think out of the reach of pardon; and, while we justly commend innocence, we give too little credit to repentance.

The misfortune is, they do not so much as suspect that there is any higher state of being, any degree of spiritual life, beyond what they have attained. They consider religion rather as a scheme of rules, than a motive principle, as a stationary point, than a perpetual progress. They consider its observances rather as an end, than a means. It is not so much natural presumption which roots them where they are, for, in ordinary cases, they are perhaps diffident and modest; it is not always conceit which

prevents their minds from shooting upwards; it is the low notion they entertain of the genius of Christianity; it is the inadequateness of their views with its requirements; it is their unacquaintedness with the spirit of that religion which they profess honestly, but understand indistinctly. This ignorance makes them rest satisfied with a state which did not satisfy the great Apostle. While *they* think they have made a progress sufficient to justify them in believing they have "already attained," *his* vast attainments served only to prevent his looking back on them, served only to stimulate him to press forward towards the mark. Some good sort of people, on the contrary, act as if they were afraid of being different from what they are, or of being surprised into becoming better than they intended.

Among the many causes which concur to keep them at a sort of determined distance from serious piety, a not uncommon one is, their happening to hear of the injudicious exhibition of religion in one or more of its high but eccentric professors: these they affect to believe, are fair specimens of the so much vaunted religious world. Instead of inquiring what is the true scriptural view of Christianity, that they may make nearer approaches to it, they are far more anxiously concerned to recede, as far as possible, from persons who falsely profess to be its best representatives. They

conclude, and, in some instances, but too justly, that the profession of these people has not transformed their hearts, but their connections; that they have adopted a party rather than a principle, embraced a cloud for a goddess, and an opinion, instead of a rule of conduct; and they observe that they are unjust in their enmities to other classes, in proportion to the violence of their attachment to their own. It is no wonder if, with their partial view of the subject, they should be deterred, when they see these persons act as much below their system, as they themselves not seldom live above their own.

But they do not act thus on other occasions. If they meet with an incompetent but blustering lawyer, or an unskilful but presumptuous physician, instead of calumniating the two learned faculties, instead of resolving to have no more to do with either, they avoid the offending individuals, and look out for sounder practitioners. Hence, indeed, it is to be remarked by the way, there arises a new and powerful motive, why all who make a high profession of religion should not only be eminently careful to exhibit an even and consistent practice, but should studiously avoid in their conversation all offensive phrases, and repulsive expressions; why they should not be perpetually intimating, as if *preaching the Gospel*

was a party business, and a business entirely confined to their own party.

Worldly observers, of the better sort, cannot sometimes but perceive in the same class of religionists, less forbearance in their temper, less patience, less moderation and kindness, than they themselves evince; they also remark in some of them, though it is doubtless done with a view not to subtract from their charities, less generosity and largeness of heart than they see in many of their own class; a petty strictness in their dealings, not quite of a piece with the liberality, I had almost said with the honesty, of Christianity. Unhappily, they are kept on their guard in the unnecessary dread of being righteous over-much, by the very peculiarities which, in these persons, indicate a defect, rather than a redundancy. These indications, however, which they conceive to be the distinctive marks of the whole tribe, make them stand aloof from Christians of the sounder class, in whom they might have seen, on a nearer approach, a fair and lovely exhibition of the principle by which they are governed.

Another preventing cause of improvement is, their associating familiarly with persons of less worth than themselves. This is injurious in two ways: — These sober followers of pleasure sanction its thoughtless devotee by the influence of their respectable character, and give weight to those who would otherwise have none, while,

at the same time, they cannot but feel their own decided superiority to those with whom their complaisance unites them; and when they compare themselves with characters so defective, they are in danger of resting still more satisfied with their own moderate, though higher, standard. But, to be conscious of being better than those who are bad, is no very solid ground either of comfort or credit.

There is another co-operating cause which keeps down their growth of piety. They are conversant with various classes of writers on different subjects, who do not indeed go farther in their disregard of religion than to let it alone; if they avowedly attacked it, the persons in question would take the alarm, and avoid the perusal of works obviously pregnant with evil. These writers do not always oppose it, but they have nothing to do with it; they virtually say, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Christianity. We are far from meaning that religion ought to be, or that it can, with propriety, be obtruded into subjects of a totally distinct nature. Yet, if its subtle and pervading principle were mixed up with the other ingredients in the mind of the author, the penetrating spirit would occasionally break through, not in matter, but in essence. Where this feeling exists in the heart, a ray of light will sometimes fall unconsciously on subjects which have no immediate connection with it.

In a cloudy day, though you do not see the body of the sun, you know, from the light it emits, that it is in its proper station.

But the writers to whom we allude take other ground: they set out with other views; their ethics have another cast. There is a pretty strong implication, especially in compositions of some of our modish itinerants, how good men may be independent of religion. In writers of a sounder cast, though also with these, amusement be the professed object, with whatever flowers they strew the path, they entice you into no morasses; you always feel there is a bottom. You go on as much entertained as if you were misled. The pleasure of an uncorrupted mind is not diminished by feeling himself safe, nor is it interrupted while he is gratifying his fancy, by being obliged to watch that no trap is laid for his principles.

To explain, by one or two instances: — Clarendon's and Burnet's Histories of their own Times no more profess to be religious works, than the Histories of Hume or Smollet. They are written by men of different political parties, of different professional engagements. Yet, though treating on subjects which naturally excluded any formal descants on religion, there is a predominating tendency which discloses the principles of both; which affords a pledge of their general principles; which makes the reader feel himself safe, because it assures him he is in the hands of a Christian historian.

Again: — In travelling to the Hebrides with Johnson, it is no small thing to find that we can be delighted without being in danger. The tourist, without stepping out of his way to hunt for moral remark or religious suggestion, never forgets that he is a Christian moralist; though in quest of mere amusement, we find our minds enriched with some just sentiment, fortified with some sound principle.

But, in the modish school, the traveller presents his benevolent man, the novelist his perfect character, the moralist his philosopher, the poet his hero, with principles, if not always elaborately in opposition to, yet thoroughly unconnected with, the Christian scheme. It is rather a silent counter-working of its necessity than an overt attack on its truth; for this strong measure is now less resorted to, as more repulsive and less successful. Neglect answers the end better than opposition. The longer any thing is kept out of sight, the less irksome its absence becomes, till, from feeling it not necessary, we proceed to think it not real. The traces of right principle grow faint in the mind, when perpetually hid by interposing objects. The misfortune is, these works make up the larger part of the study of many readers, who do not so much desire to get rid of a stricter scheme, as to lose the perception that they have it not, and the remembrance that, perhaps, they once had it.

## CHAP. XVII.

### THE INQUIRY, WHY SOME GOOD SORT OF PEOPLE ARE NOT BETTER, CONTINUED.

THERE is one prominent cause which assists in preventing the persons considered in the preceding chapter from making any material proficiency; and it is the very cause, which, if it had been rightly directed, would probably, in such minds, have led to a contrary end — their choice of *religious* reading; it is, confining their pious studies exclusively and systematically to that low standard of divinity, which has cramped the growth of many well-disposed persons. The beginning of the last century first presented us with this lax theology, which, though it has still its advocates and followers, they are, we trust, daily declining in numbers and in credit. The excess to which this deteriorated Christianity has been carried in a recent academical exhibition of "*Christian Liberty*," and especially in a late series of theological "*Hints*," by a professor of the law, has, it is to be hoped, produced a good effect. When an evil has touched its ultimate point, may we not presume that the practice may make a gradual retrocession to

sound principle? In these, and similar writers, no one but sees that the road to heaven is made far more smooth and easy than the Scriptures have made it; so smooth, as to invite many, and advance none; so easy, that not only, as in the old code, those who run may read, but those who sleep may conquer.

But what still renders this meagre divinity unfortunately too acceptable, is, that it teaches a complacency in our own goodness; that goodness, the acquisition of which is rendered easy, because it falls in so readily with our natural corruptions. The truth is, we require less to be excited to the practice of some insulated virtues, which these authors do not neglect to recommend, than to the abasing of that pride which they rather foster than correct. When we hear so much of the dignity of human nature, we secretly exult in our participation of that dignity; we take to ourselves a full share of that stock of excellence lavishly attributed to our species, and are ready to exclaim, *And I, too, am a man!* These writers make their way to the affections by a plausibility of manner which veils the shallowness of their reasoning. But the great engine of success, as we have already observed, is the prudent accommodation of the reasoning to the natural propensities of the heart, and the flattering the very evils, the existence of which they yet deny. The reader welcomes the doctrines which put him in good

humour with himself; he cordially credits the prophesier of smooth things, and is pleased, in proportion as he is not alarmed. That which does not go to the root of the evil—evil which cannot be cured without being disturbed—that which does not irritate the patient, by laying open the peccant part, will be naturally acceptable.

These writers are too much disposed to address their readers as if they were already religious; as requiring, indeed, to be reminded, but not as requiring to be alarmed; as expecting commendation for what they are, rather than admonition as to what they ought to be. They take for granted, what in some cases requires proof, that all are Christians, not in profession, but in reality: and the same uniform class of instructions, or rather of gratuitous positions, is directed to the whole mass, without any individual searchings of the heart, without any distinct address, any discriminating application to that variety of classes of which society is compounded. To the profligate liver, or the more decent sensualist; to the sceptical moralist, or the careless believer; to all, perhaps, if we might except that most hated heretic, the fanatical over-believer, is the one soothing panegyric, or the one frigid admonition, addressed. We do not pretend to say that virtue is not recommended, but as Seneca and Antoninus had recommended it before, so they had done

it better, less vaguely, and more pointedly. Many of the virtues, by the practice of which the readers are taught that salvation is to be obtained, they cannot but feel to be their own virtues. This, while it sets their apprehensions at rest, naturally fills them with complacency in their actual character, instead of kindling an ardent desire after higher attainments. Vices, from which they must be conscious they are exempt, and which they have as little excitement as occasion to practise, are properly censured; but the evil dispositions of the heart, which, if insisted on and pointedly laid open, would set them upon examining their own, are passed over, or lightly treated, or softened down into natural weakness, pardonable imperfection, or accidental infirmity. The heart is not considered as the perennial fountain of all actual offence and error.

A theology which depresses the standard, which overlooks the motives, which dilutes the doctrines, softens the precepts, lowers the sanctions, and mutilates the scheme of Christianity; which merges it in undefined generalities, which makes it consist in a system of morals which might be interwoven into almost any religion — for there are few systems of religion which profess or teach immorality; a theology which neither makes Jesus Christ the foundation, nor the Holy Spirit the efficient agent, nor inward renovation a leading principle, nor humility a

distinguishing characteristic; which insists on a good heart, but demands not a renewed heart; which inserts virtues into the stock of the old nature, but insists not on the necessity of a changed nature; — such a theology is not that which the costly apparatus of Christianity was designed to present to us. If it teaches that we have virtues to attain and imperfections to be cured, it insinuates that the one may be attained by our own strength, and the other cured without divine assistance. Our faults, if we have any, are to be surmounted by our reason, and our virtues to be improved from a regard to our comfort and the advancement of our credit; for the satisfaction they afford, and the reputation they procure us. The good man of these writers, like the good man of the ancient Stoics, is so full of virtue as to leave no room for repentance, so faultless that humility would be affectation. Like them they seem almost to diminish the distance between their Maker and themselves, by exalting the man and lowering the Deity.

The persons in question frequently read the Scriptures, and we are ready to wonder that in reading them they do not perceive their disagreement with the authors to whom we allude. There all the doctrines overlooked by them are pressed in every page; but whether they read without remarking the difference, or whether, though in the use (as we hope) of daily prayer,

they neglect to implore that Divine Spirit which inspired the Scriptures to direct the truths they contain to their hearts, they do not seem to enter into the grand peculiarities of the Gospel, nor into the personal interest they have in the doctrines it inculcates, and the precepts it enforces. How many read the account of the fall of Adam, as an historical fact, of which they never entertained a doubt, yet without feeling any more individual concern in it than in the fall of Babylon, without being sensible of any corresponding contamination in their own hearts. When told of the self-denying doctrines which Christianity includes, they triumphantly produce passages, not only from Solomon and St. Paul, but from the Saviour himself, which completely contradict such gloomy assertions, *that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;* that *Christ's commands are not grievous;* that *his yoke is easy*, with a multitude of the same animating strain. But they produce them, not so much because they are indeed most delightful truths, as because they are supposed to annul such less engaging texts as are descriptive of *the strait gate*, and *the narrow way*, and *the few who enter them;* of the difficulty with which the rich, that is, those who trust in riches, shall attain to heaven; that *taking up the cross* is an indispensable qualification for the followers of him who suffered on it, with an endless multitude of similar passages.

Now the truth is, there is not the slightest disagreement between these two classes of texts. The unqualified peace, joy, and comfort, expressed in the former, represent what religion is in herself, describe her native excellence, her genuine beauty, her original perfection. Whereas the difficulties attached to the second class arise necessarily from that depravity of the will, that alienation from God and goodness, which render that irksome which is in itself delightful. To him who knows, because he feels the natural reluctance of the heart to the requisitions of a religion calculated to produce these happy effects, there is a perfect congruity between the passages thus set in opposition. Though both are true, each is consistent with the other; but their truth and consistency strike not those who reject or adopt what best suits their creed or their convenience.

They know, indeed, that they must give a nominal assent to the doctrine of divine assistance, because it is said to be a doctrine of that Scripture which they believe; but they assent to it with implicitness, rather than conviction; and if they do allow the intervention of the Holy Spirit, they attach an undue value to human agency. If they say, they are far from excluding heavenly aid, their assent somewhat resembles that of the Welsh captain, who, when Henry the Fifth, after the battle of Agincourt,

ascribed exclusively the victory to God, coolly replied, "indeed He did us great good."

But many of the writers to whom we have adverted, and by whom the persons in question are influenced, seem to make their reverence for the Scriptures a ground for disallowing the agency of the Spirit; as if there were not the most perfect agreement between an appeal to the one and a belief in the other. The Spirit of God leads us to no new instructor, but only points us to his word, teaching us to discern it more clearly, and to receive it more affectionately. That would be, indeed, an illusion, not an illumination, which would direct us to derive our instruction from any other fountain than the oracles of truth.

These persons are striking instances how dexterously we contrive to turn the scale in our own favour, by balancing some lesser fault to which we are now inclined against some strongly besetting wrong propensity. We seldom soften down any precept that is not pointed at our particular temptation. All the other laws we allow to be not only good and holy, but just, for they only affect other people. The young man in the Gospel had no objection to those commandments which were suggested to him as the rule of duty; for he was chaste and honest, neither a disobedient son, nor a murderer, addicted neither to idolatry nor profaneness; but the command to dispossess himself of his fortune

for charitable purposes cut deep, for he was not only rich, but avaricious. It is thus we prevaricate with duty. We would warp the precept to our passions, instead of bending our inclinations to the duty. We lament the harshness of the command, when we should be lamenting the perversity of the will.'

A low standard of religion flatters our vanity, is easily acted up to, does not wound our self-love, is practicable without sacrifices, and respectable without self-denial. It allows the implantation of virtues without eradicating vices, recommends right actions without expelling wrong principles, and grafts fair appearances upon unresisted corruptions.

This low tone of religion is rendered still more acceptable, from being sprinkled with frequent vituperations of that species of Christianity now derided by a term which was once considered as its specific character. This term, what with the too-monopolising adoption of it by one description of persons, and the contemptuous implication conveyed in the use of it by another, we almost fear to use, lest we should be conjuring up the spirit of fanaticism in the minds of the latter class, or vindicating its exclusive adoption in the language of the former. The assumption of names on the one hand, and if I may venture so vulgar a phrase, calling names on the other, have been of infinite disservice to religion. Such is the new meaning now assigned to old

terms, that we doubt if the application of the epithet in question would not excite a sneer, if not a suspicion, against the character of Isaiah, himself, were we to name him by his ancient denomination, *the Evangelical Prophet*. This laconic term includes a volume in a word. It is established into a sweeping term of derision of all serious Christians, and its compass is stretched to such an extent, as to involve within it every shade and shape of real or fictitious piety, from the elevated but sound and sober Christian, to the wildest and most absurd fanatic; its large inclosure takes in all, from the most honourable heights of erudition to the most contemptible depths of ignorance. Every man who is serious, and every man who is silly, every man who is holy, and every man who is mad, is included in this comprehensive epithet. We see perpetually that solidity, sublimity, and depth, are not found a protection against the magic mischief of this portentous appellation.

It gratifies us to be assured that our own tone is sufficiently high, and that, whatever is higher, is erroneous, or superfluous, or hypocritical, or ridiculous. This it is which attaches many a reader to the opposite style of writing, and, in proportion as it attaches him, by reconciling him more to himself, animates him more fiercely against those who make higher requisitions of faith and holiness, those who strip off the mask from actions unfounded in principle, who exact

self-abasement, who insist on the necessity of good works, not as a meritorious ground of salvation, but as an evidence of obedience to God, and of conformity to Christ.

Most sincerely do we believe, that there is nothing which the better sort of this class dread more than hypocrisy. But do they not sometimes dread the imputation almost as much as the thing? And is it not to be feared that, with the dread of this odious vice being imputed to them, is a little connected the suspicion of its existence in all who go farther than themselves? Are they not too ready to accuse of want of sincerity or of soberness, every one who rises above their own level? Is not every degree of warmth in their pious affections, every expression of zeal in their conversation, every indication of strictness in their practice, construed into an implication, that so much as this zeal and strictness exceed their own, there is in them just so much error as that excess involves?

By the class of writers to which they are attached, the pious affections are branded as the stigma of enthusiasm. But a religion which is all brain, and no heart, is not the religion of the Gospel. The spirit there exhibited is as far removed from philosophical apathy, as from the intemperate language of passion. There are minds so constituted, and hearts so touched, that they cannot meditate on the incarnation of the Son of God, his voluntary descent from the

glory which he had with his Father from all eternity, his dying for us men and for our salvation — with the same unmoved temper with which they acknowledge the truth of any other fact. A grateful feeling, excited by these causes, is as different from a fanatical fervour as it is from a languid acknowledgment. It is not energy, however, which is reprobated, so much as the cause of its excitement. Should the zealous Christian change the object of his admiration, should he express the same animated feeling for Socrates, which the other had expressed for his Saviour, his enthusiasm would be ascribed to his good taste, and the object would be allowed to justify the rapture.

But, is not objecting to earnestness in religion to strike out of the catalogue of virtues that quality which so eminently distinguished the Scripture worthies? Is it not denying that "spirit of power and of love" which, it is worth observing, the Apostle makes the associate of "a sound mind," to deny that Christianity ought to make an impression on the heart, and if on the heart, on the feelings? These fastidious critics place, what they call the abstract truths of religion, on the same footing with abstract truths in science; they allow only the same intellectual conviction of truth, the same cool assent, in the one case, which is given to a demonstration in the other. But would not he be thought a defective orator at the bar, or in the senate, who

should plead as if he did not know that men had feelings to be touched as well as understandings to be convinced; who considered the affections as the only portion of character to which he must be careful not to advert, in addressing beings who are feeling as well as intelligent? Shall a fervent rhetoric be admired in one orator, when pleading for the freedom of men, and reprobated in another, when pleading for their salvation? Shall we be enraptured with the eloquent advocate for the Agrarian law, and disgusted with the strenuous advocate for the everlasting Gospel? Shall not one man be allowed the same earnestness in combating unbelief, which has immortalised another in execrating rapine and extortion?

It must, assuredly, be maintained, that there is such a sober mode of exhibiting truth, as may show that the sacred messenger has no delight in declaring that part of his message which yet it is his duty to deliver; which, while it cannot fail to call forth every feeling of interest for the souls of men, at the same time demands the utmost tenderness, as treating of their dangers. Tenderness, it is true, must not alter truth, nor conceal menaces, which make an awful part of it. Yet a difference may be sometimes inferred by the manner of delivering them. Who has not heard a holy man, who, feeling himself bound to declare the whole counsel of God, has denounced his solemn judgments with a subdued

voice, and an almost hesitating accent; speaking as one who felt that he was acquitting himself of a painful, but bounden duty; — while another of a coarser make, and a less mortified spirit, proclaims the commanded threat in all the thunders of Sinai; seeming, by his tone and gesture, to rejoice that it has fallen to his lot to alarm, and not to console? The one "persuades men" because he knows "the terrors of the Lord;" the other seems to have his own gratification in terrifying. The one evidently rejoices in being the ambassador of reconciliation; the other appears, but is not, we are assured, really, glad to bear the mandate of condemnation.

But, to return to writers in the extreme of the other class.—Vague essays on general and undefined morality, which we here venture to represent as their fault, are very different from distinct discourses or treatises on the several virtues; these latter flow from the study, and teach the improvement, of the human heart. But to produce their effect, they must produce their commission. The proclamation must always have the broad seal of Christianity appended to it. It is indeed not only unnecessary, but impossible and imprudent, that in every discourse the whole scheme of Christian doctrine should be laid open. An attempt to do this has frequently produced confusion, by crowding in more materials than the space will

contain; and thus leaving the stamp of no one truth distinct upon the mind. We mean no more, than that the general impression made, should be, that the moral quality under discussion should appear to be explicitly derived from the school of Christ, and the reader not be left to exercise his ingenuity in conjecturing, till the closing sentence informs him, to what system of religion it belongs.

It is also perfectly proper to cut the circle of the virtues into segments, provided it be shown how they are connected with each other, and how the whole fall within the circumference of that divine religion which is their proper centre. It were also to be wished, that there were no undue and hyperbolical exaltation of the virtue under consideration, which often makes a part stand for the whole. This exclusive praise of the quality inculcated, is, to Christianity, what it would be to general geography, if, in order to give an idea of our world, a map of a single country should be exhibited without coast or boundary. It differs from the Christian exhibition of moral virtues, as this insulated map would differ from a chart of the same country when delineated on the globe; there you see not only the country itself correctly displayed, but you perceive by what sea it is bordered, on what land it touches, into what other country some points of this cut deep, and how narrow are the bounds which separate it from some hos-

tile neighbour; you see, also, its dependence on every thing about it, and its relative situation on the earth.

If we might be allowed another illustration, we would observe, that to expect to give a just idea of Christianity by any quality, as detached from the whole, would be to resemble a certain Athenian, who, having a palace to sell, took out a single brick from the wall, and produced it at the auction as a specimen of the edifice.

Nor, as we humbly conceive, is it a superfluous care, so to contrive, as that, when it is right to expose any vice to reprobation, the reader who is exempt from it may not too much plume himself upon the exemption. A venerable clergyman once assured the author that he had never done so much mischief as by the best sermon he had ever preached. It was against the sin of drunkenness. It happened to be an offence to which none of his auditors were addicted. After it was over, some of them expressed no small triumph at their own secure state, from a consciousness of being free from the vice which had been so well exposed, and, as if the exercise of no virtue but the one opposite to the sin in question had been necessary, they went home exulting in their own superior goodness.

The writers to whom we have been referring, triumphantly distinguish themselves by the appellation of *practical*, in studied opposition to those who are professedly doctrinal. Let it,

however, be observed, that maintaining a due respect for the conscientious of both classes, we only presume to allude, in our animadversion, to those of either side, who carry their specific characteristics into an extreme, in which each excludes its opposite. But far more deficient are the practical discussions of the one, if they want the solid weight and metal of the Gospel to make them sterling, than the doctrinal dissertations of the other; which, however, ought never to want the intelligible superscription of practical remark to render them current. Yet is there not sometimes a misnomer in the former appellation? Can that writing be called truly practical which does not attempt greatly to raise the tone of conduct; which does not press practice home on the conscience as flowing from the highest principle, and directed to the noblest end; which is not urged on that ground of argument that is the most cogent, nor inferred from that motive which is the most irresistible, nor impressed by that authority best calculated to secure obedience? The nature of the action commonly participates in the nature of the motive. Practice is not likely to rise higher than the spring which set it a-going.

At the same time, it is but fair to confess, that much of that species of composition which assumes a more spiritual character, is sometimes lamentably deficient in this grand requisite. It begins not seldom, by laying a good and solid

foundation; but when we lift our eyes to look upon the structure which we expected to see raised upon it, we find it negligently run up, if not totally omitted. Practice seems to be considered as a thing of course, not necessary to be insisted on, much less to have its path clearly chalked out. The use to be made of the doctrine which has been delivered, is turned over to the piety or ingenuity of the reader, without any specific direction, or personal application. Too much is left for him to supply, which perhaps implicitly leaning on his guide, he will not supply, or which, from want of knowledge, he cannot.

Far be it from our intention, however, in thus venturing with real diffidence to compare the faulty extremes in both cases, to assimilate at all their nature or their tendency: — the extreme of adherence to doctrine frequently springing from the deepest sense of the infinite importance of that doctrine, and accompanied with a pious willingness to spend, and be spent, in its propagation. The extreme of adherence to what is called mere morality, is too often the lamentable effect of ignorance of doctrine, and of an interest neither felt, not possessed, nor desired, in doctrinal blessings.

With this guard distinctly kept in view, we venture, with all humility, to repeat, that there is an extreme on both sides: the one may be abstractedly considered as all propositions, the

other as all conclusions. The one fails of effect by not depending on just premises; in the other, well-established premises produce inferior good, because the conclusions are not sufficiently brought to bear on the actual demands of life. The one, while he powerfully shows the reader that he is a sinner, limits both his proof and his instruction to one or two prominent doctrines; he names, indeed, with unwearied iteration, that only name by which we can be saved, faithfully dwells on the efficacy of the divine remedy, but without clearly pointing out its application to practical purposes. The other presumes his readers to be so wise as to be able to supply their own deficiencies, or so good, as to stand in little need of supernatural assistance. Is it not mocking human helplessness, to tell men they must be holy, good, and just, without directing them to the principle from whence "all holy thoughts, all good counsels, and all just works, do proceed" — to direct the stream of action, and keep out of sight the spring from which it must flow — to expect they will renounce sin if they do not renounce self — to send them vagrant in search of some stray virtue, without showing them where to apply for direction to find it?

The combination of the opposite but indispensable requisites is most happily exemplified in all our best divines, living and dead; and,

blessed be God, very numerous is the catalogue in both instances. They have, with a large and liberal construction, followed that most perfect exemplification of this union which is so generally exhibited in Scripture, more particularly in that express model, the third chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians. There, every thing that is excellent in practice is made to proceed from Him "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There, every act has its inspiring motive, every virtue its radical principle; falsehood is not only prohibited to the converts, but the prohibition is accounted for, "*because* ye have put on the new man." The obedience of wives, the affection of husbands, the submission of children, all is to be done "in the name of the Lord Jesus." — Servants are enjoined to fidelity as "fearing God." "Mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering," are recommended, *because* the converts "are the elect of God." Every inhibition of every wrong practice has its reference to Christ, every act of goodness its legitimate principle. Contentions are forbidden, forgiveness is enjoined, on the same high ground — the example of "Him in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." This is *practical preaching* — this is *evangelical preaching*.

## CHAP. XVIII.

### THOUGHTS RESPECTFULLY SUGGESTED TO GOOD SORT OF PEOPLE.

In perusing the foregoing chapter, it may be, as it has been, with unexhausted repetition, objected, that it is equally preposterous and unjust, to hold out a standard of religion and morals so high, as to defeat in the reader all hope of attaining to it. It may be urged, that it would be more prudent, as well as more useful, to propose a more moderate standard, and to suggest a more temperate measure, which would not, as in the present case, by discouraging, render attainment hopeless. For an answer, we must send them to the Redeemer's own mouth, to the excision of the right hand, the plucking out the right eye. This, it will be justly insisted, is not a command, but a metaphor. Granted. — We know we are not commanded to lop off our limbs, but our corruptions. But, would He who is not only true, but THE TRUTH, adopt a strong metaphor to express a feeble obligation? Is any tone, then, may we not ask, too high, if not higher than that uniformly employed in the Bible? What do we mean, when we say, that

we receive the Gospel as a rule of faith and practice, if, having made the declaration, we instantly go, and, without scruple, lower the rule, and depress the practice?

High and low are indefinite terms: their just use depends on the greatness or littleness of the objects to which they refer. When we consider, that the object in question is eternal life, should the standard which God has made the measure of our attaining to it be so depressed as to prevent that attainment? Do not the apostles and their Master, the saints and the King of saints, every where suggest a rule, not only of excellence, but perfection? a rule to the adoption of which no hopelessness of attainment is to prevent our stretching forward?

Scripture does, indeed, every where represent us as incompetent without divine assistance. But does it not every where point out where our strength lies; where it is to be sought; how it is to be obtained? It not only shows where our wants may be supplied, but our failures pardoned. Does any one doctrine, any one precept, of the Gospel, deal in emollients, prescribe palliatives, suggest petty reliefs, point out inferior remedies, speak of any medicine, but such as is proportioned to the depth of the disease?

Yet it is not uncommon for those whose views have been low, and whose practice, con-

sequently, has not been high, to combine with this mediocrity of character the most exalted expectation of future recompense; to couple a comparatively low faith and conduct with those lofty promises which the New Testament holds out to the most exalted Christian. Many in the day of health and activity would have considered "taking up the cross," "living to him who died for them," &c. &c. as figurative expressions, lively images, not exacting much practical obedience; nay, would have considered the proposal of bringing them into action as downright enthusiasm; yet who has not heard these persons, in a dangerous sickness, repeat with entire self-application, the glorious and hard-earned exultation of him, who, after unrivalled sufferings and unparalleled services, after having been "in deaths oft," after having been even favoured with a glimpse of heaven, exclaims, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course," — and then go on, with the most delusive complacency, to apply to themselves the sublime apostrophe with which this fine exclamation is wound up, — "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory," &c. &c.? and it has passed into an accredited phrase, when one of this sort of Christians speaks of the death of another in the same class, to observe, with an air of triumph, that *he is gone to his reward.*

We must confess, that when we hear this assurance so applied, we charitably incline to hope it is not so bad with them as the expression implies; because, if heaven is thus assigned as a payment of work done, one cannot help trembling at a reward apportioned to such worth. For these contractors for heaven, who bring their merit as their purchase-money, and intend to be saved at their own expense, do not always take care to be provided with a very exorbitant sum, though they expect so large a return in exchange for it; while those who, placing no dependence on their works, never dare to draw upon heaven for the payment, will often be found to have a much larger stock upon hand, ready to produce as an evidence, though they renounce them as a claim. In both cases, is it not safer to transfer them and ourselves from merit to mercy, as a more humble and less hazardous ground of dependence?

Far be from me the uncharitable presumption, that these sanguine persons are destitute of principle, or void of right intentions. Doubtless, in many instances, they persevere in error for no reason, but because they believe it to be truth. There is even much that is right in them; but are they not too easily satisfied with a low measure of that right, without examining accurately the quality of the practice, merely because it is not disreputable?

Our knowledge of religion and sound morals must inevitably arise, in a good measure, from the knowledge of ourselves. Now, the kind of reading of which we have complained, is so far from improving that knowledge, that it keeps it out of our sight, by representing us to ourselves as other creatures than we really are. The most ingenious abstract reasoning on man will not show him what sort of being he is, if he be not taught to know it within himself. He must seek it in the depths of his own mind, and compare what he finds there with the unerring law of God. The facts he might deduce, and the experiments he might make from the study of both in conjunction, would teach him either to confirm or correct his theory; his experience, if it did not establish, would overturn his speculations, and he would begin to build on new ground.

May we not be allowed with all tenderness and respect, not with the arrogance of any superiority, but such as is the inevitable fruit of long observation, to suggest a few of the many remedies against the evil we have been regretting? The true preliminary to vital religion is to feel and acknowledge our lapsed humanity. There is no entrance into the temple of Christianity but through this lowly vestibule. All the dissertations of the most profound philosophers on the reasonableness and beauty of our religion, on its excellence and superiority,

are but a fruitless exercise of ingenuity and eloquence, if they exclude this fundamental truth. The ablest writer, if he does not feel this conviction in his own heart, will never carry it to yours. But if you have once got over this hard and humbling introduction, the same divine guide who has given this initiatory opening, will, to the patient and persevering inquirer, perfect the work he has so happily begun. While he who turns over the page of his own virtues, and ransacks the catalogue of his good actions, will find that, under the pretence of seeking consolation, he is evading instruction; he is only heaping up materials for building confidence in himself — "by that sin fell the angels" — and may be in little less danger than the flagitious offender. Our Lord has decided on this momentous question, by his preference of the self-abasing penitent who had nothing to ask but mercy, to him who had nothing to request but praise; of the lowly confessor of his offences to the pompous recounter of his virtues; whose prayer, if self-panegyric deserves that name, plainly declared that he already possessed so much, that there was nothing left for him to ask. Our Saviour took this occasion to let us see, that he is better pleased when we show him our wants, than our merits.

As you do not live in the practice or the allowance of vices, which make it your interest

to wish that Christianity may be false, and as you believe its external evidences, endeavour to gain also an internal conviction that it is true. Examine also into the principle of your best actions. Even some who have made a more considerable proficiency, are too apt to defer examining into the motive, till they have concluded the act which the motive should have determined; they then, as it were, make up the motive to the act, and bring about the accordance in a way to quiet their own minds. Perhaps interest is acting on an opinion which we fancied that wisdom had suggested. If it succeed, we compliment ourselves on the event; if it fail, we applaud ourselves on the assigned, because we are not quite sure of the real, motive.

The way to make a progress in piety and peace, is not to be too tender of our present feelings; is nobly to make some sacrifice of immediate ease, for the sake of acquiring future happiness. Desire not opiates, seek not anodynes, when your internal constitution requires stimulants. Cease to conceive of religion as a stationary thing; be assured, that to be available, it must be progressive. Read the Scriptures, not as a form, but as God's great appointed means, of infusing into your heart that life-giving principle which is the spring of all right practice. Cultivate every virtue, but rest not in any. Do every thing to deserve the esteem of men, but make not that esteem your govern-

ing principle. Value not most those qualities which are the most popular. Correct your worldly wisdom with "the wisdom which is from above." Bear in your recollection, that, to minds of a soft and yielding cast, the world is a more formidable enemy than those two other rival tempers which the New Testament commonly associates with it, and which would not, generally, have made a third in such corrupt company, if its dangers had not borne some proportion to theirs. It is the more necessary to press this point, as the mischiefs of the world are felt without being suspected. The other two spiritual enemies seize on the more corrupt; but the better disposed are the unconscious victims of the world, which frequently betrays it votary into the hands of its two confederates. People are inclined to be pleased with themselves when the world flatters them; they make the world their supreme arbiter; they are unwilling to appeal from so lenient a judge; and, being satisfied with themselves, when its verdict is in their favour, the applause of others too often, by confirming their own, supersedes an inquiry into their real state.

The unconfirmed Christian should attend to his conduct just in those points which, though dishonest, are not dishonourable; points in which, though religion will be against him, the approbation of the world will bear him out. He would not do a disreputable thing, but should

a temptation arise where his reputation is safe, there his trial commences, there he must guard himself with augmented vigilance.

The more enlightened the conscience becomes, the more we shall discover the unspeakable holiness of God. But our perceptions being cleared, and our spiritual discernment rendered more acute, this must not lead us to fancy that we are worse than when we thought so well of ourselves. We are not worse, because the growing light of divine truth reveals faults unobserved before to our view, or enlarges those we thought insignificant. Light does not create impurities, it only discloses them. Moreover, this efficient Spirit does not illuminate without correcting; it is not only given for reproof, but amendment; not only for amendment, but consolation. Our unhappiness does not consist in that contrition which grows out of our new acquaintance with our own hearts. The true misery consisted in the blindness, presumption, and self-sufficiency, which our ignorance of ourselves generated. Our true felicity begins in our being brought, however severe be the means, to renounce our self-confidence, and cast ourselves entirely upon God.

It will be a good test of the improving state of a person of the above description, when he can patiently, though not at first pleasantly, persevere in the perusal of works which do not flatter his security; nay, to persevere the more

earnestly, because the perusal discovers his own character to himself. When once he is brought to endure these salutary probings, he will soon be brought to court the hand that probes. He will begin to disrelish the vapid civility with which the superficial examiner treats human nature. Nay, he may now safely meditate on the *dignity* of man, which, in his former state, so far misled him. He will find that, in another sense, the doctrine is true. Man was indeed originally a dignified creature, for he was made in the image of the perfect God. Even now, though his will is depraved, yet he has noble intellectual faculties which give some notion of what he was. His heart is alienated, but his understanding approves the rectitude which his will rejects. He has still recoverable powers; he is still capable, when divine truth shall have made its full impression on his soul, of that renovation which shall restore him to the dignity he has lost, reinstate him in the favour he has forfeited, and raise him infinitely higher than the elevation from which he has fallen.

To those who attempt to relieve his temporary distress by directing his eyes to his own virtues, and to the approbation those virtues are certain to obtain from Heaven, he will reply with the illustrious sufferer of old, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" Slight remedies will no longer satisfy him. The more deep his views become, the less he will be disposed to claim his

share in the compliments lavished on the natural human character.

But, oh! what unspeakable consolation will the humble believer derive from the appellation by which the Divine Spirit is designated — The COMFORTER. There is something sublimely merciful in a dispensation, of which the term is so delightfully expressive of the thing. We read in Scripture of *grieving* the Holy Spirit; but when we consider him under this most soothing character, is there not something of peculiar and heinous ingratitude in *grieving the Comforter?*

To endeavour to obtain a more lively belief in the existence, and earnestly to implore the aid of his quickening spirit, would be a great means of improving the character. That the doctrine of spiritual influence is a practical doctrine, is clearly deducible from the command, arising out of the conviction, that the truth was already received — "If ye *live* in the spirit, *walk* in the spirit." Observe that we press you only on your own principles: we recommend you only to act upon the creed you avow. If we suggest to your adoption any thing further than the Bible enjoins, we are guilty of fanaticism, and you should be on your guard against it. We venture not to say what name is due to those who would depress your views greatly below either.

In perusing the Scriptures, might you not commune with your own heart in something like

the following language: — "This book is not a work of fancy. I do not, therefore, read it for amusement, but instruction; but am I seriously proposing to read it like one who has a deep interest in its contents? Is it my sincere intention to convert the knowledge I am about to acquire into any practical application to my own case? Is it my earnest wish to improve the state of my own heart by comparing it with what I allow to be the only perfect rule of faith and practice? Do I only read to get over my morning's task, the omission of which would make me uneasy, merely to fasten a series of facts on my memory? Or do I really desire to make the great truths of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of a living faith, a sound repentance, an entire conviction that, of myself, I can do nothing; not merely a speculative system to be recognised at church, but to be transfused into the life? Do I adopt religion as a hereditary, national profession, necessary to my credit, or as a thing in which I have a momentous personal interest? Do I propose to apply what I read to the pulling down those high imaginations, and that false security, of which my Bible shows me the danger, and which its doctrines are calculated to subdue? Do I labour after the attainment of those heavenly dispositions, the exhibition of which I have been admiring? Have these vivid declarations of the unsatisfac-

toriness of the world at all cooled my ardour for its enjoyments? Shall I read here this holy contempt for the littleness of its pursuits, this display of its fallacies and deceits, and yet return this very evening to the participation of diversions, the exposure of whose emptiness I have been approving? Shall I extol the writer who strips off its painted mask from the world, and yet act as if the morning lecture had brought no such discovery? Nay, perhaps, it may be one of my subjects of conversation to recommend a book, of whose little efficacy in my own case I am giving a practical example.

Do I not periodically pray, "Make me to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting," and yet am I not as shy of the society of those who are distinguished for more than common sanctity, as if it carried contamination with it? And does not the very term convey to my mind a discreditable idea, compounded of fanaticism and hypocrisy?

After all, I may have been wrong. If respectability were security, the young ruler in the Gospel had been in no danger, for his attainments were above the ordinary standard, and his credit was probably high. It is time to come to something like certainty; to inquire, whether I do cordially believe what I should be ashamed not to profess; whether my religion lives in my memory or my heart, on my lips or in my life, in my profession or my practice? It is time to

examine, whether I have much more distinct evidences of divine truth than those who do not acknowledge the Gospel to be a revelation from heaven; to inquire, why, if my understanding be somewhat more enlightened, such illumination is not more perceptible on my heart? "Why the fruits of the Spirit," so far from "abounding" in me, scarcely appear, if those fruits are indeed "love, peace, and joy in believing?"

Let not the fear of labour, or the dread of pain, prevent you from endeavouring to obtain a clear view of your state. Let not a pusillanimous apprehension of reproach or ridicule prevent your following up your convictions. There is not any thing that is unreasonable, much less any thing that is impossible, required; no degree of zeal, or measure of earnestness, but what you see every day exerted in a worse cause. Take your measure from the world, not in *what* you shall pursue, but in the energy with which you shall urge the pursuit. Only devote to religion as much time as the worldly devote to dissipation; only set your affections on heaven as intensely as theirs are set upon earth, and all will be well: or take your measure from your former self; take at least as much pains to secure your eternal interests as you have formerly taken to acquire a language or an art. Read the word of inspiration with the same assiduity with which you have studied a favourite

classic: strive with as much energy to acquire a thorough insight into the corruptions of your heart, and the remedy proposed for their cure, as you have exerted in studying the principles of your profession, or the mysteries of your calling. Inspect your consciences as accurately as your expenses; be as frugal of your time as of your fortune, and as careful of your soul as of your credit. Be neither terrified by terms, nor governed by them.

In reading those heart-searching writers, whose principles are drawn from the source of all truth, and who are only to be trusted as they are analogous to it, be not offended with some strong expressions. They expressed forcibly what they felt powerfully. The revolting term of *sinner*, which has, perhaps, made you throw aside the book, as thinking it addressed only to the perpetrators of great crimes, as fitter language for the prisons and the hulks, than for the polished and the pleasing, is addressed to every one, however profound his knowledge, however decent his life, however amiable his manners, who lives without habitual reference to God. Be more than honest, be courageous; boldly apply it to yourself. Though your character is unstained with any disgraceful vice, though you regularly fulfil many relative duties, yet if you are destitute of the prime duty, the love of God in Christ Jesus, you stand in need

of such a forcible address as we have been supposing. The discovery will be no dishonour. The dishonour consists in not feeling your state, in not struggling against it; in not applying with humble fervour for assistance to the Fountain of grace and mercy.

Take comfort that you have great advantages over many others. You have few bad habits to retract; you have no scandalous vices to combat; you have already with certain persons acquired a degree of influence by your good qualities; with others, you have acquired it by your very defects, and, as you are not suspected of enthusiasm, your usefulness will not be impeded by having that suspicion to repel. You will continue to do, in many respects, the same things which you did before. The exterior of your life may be in many points nearly the same. But, even the same actions will be done in another spirit and to another end. Religion will not convert you into misanthropes, insensible to all the dear affections which make life pleasant. It does not wish to send you with the hermits of old to the deserts of Thebais, it only wishes you to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in your own families, and among your own connections. Not one of the proper forms and harmless habits of polished society will be impaired, they will be rather improved by this mutation of the mind. Christian humility will be aiding all the best purposes of good breeding,

while it will furnish a higher principle for its exercise. You may express this change in your character by what name you please, so that the change be but effected. It is not what you are called, but what you are, which will make the specific distinction between the character you adopt, and that which you have quitted. You read the Bible now, but between reading it mechanically and spiritually, there is as much difference, as between pouring a fluid on the ground and distilling it. The one "cannot be gathered up" afterwards; from the other, we extract, drop by drop, a precious and powerful essence.

Search, then, diligently, the word of eternal life, enriched and ennobled as it is with the chain and the accomplishment of its prophecies; with the splendour of its miracles; with the attestation of its martyrs; the consistency of its doctrines; the importance of its facts; the plenitude of its precepts; the treasury of its promises; the irradiations of the Spirit; the abundance of its consolations; the peace it bestows; the blessedness it announces; the proportion of its parts; the symmetry of the whole; — altogether presenting such a fund of instruction to the mind, of light to the path, of document to the conduct, of satisfaction to the heart, as demonstrably prove it to be the instrument of God for the salvation of man.

## CHAP. XIX.

### ON HABITS.

HABITS are those powers of the mind which arise from a collection or rather a successive course of ordinary actions. As they are formed by a concatenation of those actions, so they may be weakened by frequent and allowed interruptions; and if many contiguous links are wilfully broken, the habits themselves are in danger of being totally demolished.

If we may be allowed to change the metaphor, we would observe that good habits produce a sound healthy constitution of mind: they are tonics which gradually, but infallibly, invigorate the intellectual man. A silent course of habits is a part of our character or rather conduct, which in a great measure depends on industry and application; on self-denial and watchfulness; on diligence in establishing right pursuits, and vigilance in checking such as are pernicious. Habit being an engine put into our hands for the noblest and most beneficial purposes; and being one, which, having the free command of our own faculties, we have a power to use and direct — a power, indeed, derived from God as

all our other possessions are — yet having this power, it rests with ourselves whether we shall improve it by a vigorous exertion in a right bent, or whether we shall turn it against our Maker, and direct the course of our conduct to the offending, instead of pleasing, God.

Habits are not so frequently formed by vehement incidental efforts on a few great occasions, as by a calm and steady perseverance in the ordinary course of duty. If this were uniformly followed up, we should be spared that occasional violence to our feelings, that agitating resistance, which, by wasting the spirits, lead more feeble minds to dread the recurrence of the same necessity which induces a painful feeling, the consequence of negligence, even where there is real rectitude of heart; while the regular adoption of right habits, indented by repetition, establishes such a tranquillity of spirit, as contributes to promote happiness no less than virtue. The mind, like the body, gains robustness and activity by the habitual exercise of its powers. Occasional right actions may be caprice, may be vanity, may be impulse, but hardly deserve the name of virtue, till they proceed from a principle which habit has moulded into a frame; then the right principle which first set them at work continues to keep them at it, and finally becomes so prevalent, that there is a kind of spontaneity in the act, which keeps up the energy, without constant

sensible reference to the spring which first set it in motion. Good habits are good dispositions ripened by repetition into virtue, and sanctified by prayer into holiness. If we allow that vicious habits persisted in, lay us more and more open to the dominion of our spiritual adversary, can we doubt that virtuous habits acquire proportional strength from the super-induced aid of the Spirit of God?

The more uniform is our conformity to the rules of virtue and purity, the less we may require to be reminded of the particular influence of the motive. We need not, nor, indeed, can we, recur every moment to the exact source of the action; its flowing from an habitual sense of duty will generally explain the ground on which it is performed. If the heart is kept awake and alive in a cheerful obedience to God, the immediate motive of the immediate act is not likely to be a bad one. Many actions, indeed, require to be deliberated on, and whatever requires deliberation before we do it, demands scrutiny why we do it. This will lead to such an inquest into our motive as, if there be any want of sincerity in it, will tend to its detection.

Notwithstanding what has been urged above as to the exercise of constant assiduity in preference to mere occasional exertion, we would be understood to offer this counsel rather to the proficient than to the novice. As the be-

ginnings are always difficult, especially to ardent spirits, such spirits would do well, particularly at their entrance on a more correct course, to select for themselves some single task of painful exertion, which, by bringing their mental vigour into full play, shall afford them so sensible an evidence of the conquest they have obtained, as will more than repay the labour of the conflict. A friend of the author was so fully aware of the importance of thus taming an impatient temper, that she imposed upon herself the habit of beginning even any ordinary undertaking with the most difficult part of it, instead of following the usual method of proceeding from the lower to the higher. If a language was to be learnt, she began with a very difficult author; if a scheme of economy was to be improved, she relinquished at once some prominent indulgence; if a vanity was to be cut off, she fixed on some strong act of self-denial which should appear a little disreputable to others, while it somewhat mortified herself. These incipient trials once got over, she had a large reward in finding all lesser ones in the same class comparatively light. The main victory was gained in the onset, the subsequent skirmishes cost little.

If it be said that the effort is too violent, the change too sudden, we apprehend the assertion is a mistake. When we have worked up ourselves, or, rather, are worked up by a superior

agency to a strong measure, it becomes a point of honour, as well as of duty, to persist; we are ashamed of stopping short, and especially of retreating, though we have no witness but God and our own hearts. Having once persevered, the victory is the reward. A slower change, though desirable, has less stimulus, less animation, is less sensibly marked; we cannot recur, as in the other case, to the hour of conquest, nor have we so clear a consciousness of having obtained it.

But the conquests we have won we must maintain. The fruits of the initiatory victory may be lost, if vigilance does not guard that which valour subdued. If the relinquishment of evil habits is so difficult, it is not less necessary to be watchful, lest we should insensibly slide into the negligence of such as are good. What we neglect we gradually forget. This guard against declension is the more requisite, as the human mind is so limited, that one object quickly expels another. A new idea takes possession as soon as its predecessor is driven out; and the very traces of former habits are effaced, not suddenly, but progressively; no two successive ideas being, perhaps, very dissimilar, while the last in the train will be of a character quite different, not from that which immediately preceded, but from that which first began to draw us off from the right habit; the impression continues to grow fainter,

till that which at first was weakened, is at length obliterated.

If we do not establish the habit of the great statesman of Holland, to do only one thing at a time, we shall do nothing well; the whole of our understanding, however highly we may rate it, is not too much to give to any subject which is of sufficient importance to require investigation at all; certainly is not great enough to afford being split into as many parts, as we may choose to take subjects simultaneously in hand. If we allow the different topics which require deliberation to break in on each other; if a second is admitted to a conference, before we have dismissed the first, as neither will be distinctly considered, so neither is likely to obtain a just decision. These desultory pursuits obstruct the establishment of correct habits.

But it requires the firm union of a sound principle with an impartial judgment to ascertain that the habit is really good, or the mischief will be great in proportion to the pertinacity. For who can conceive a more miserable state, than for a man to be goaded on by a long perseverance in habits, which both his conscience and his understanding condemn? Even if upon conviction he renounces them, he has a long time to spend in retreating, with the mortification at last, to find himself only where he ought to have been at setting out.

Without insisting on the difficulty of totally subduing long-indulged habits of any gross vice, such as intemperance; we may remark, that it requires a long and painful process — and this even after a man is convinced of its turpitude, after he discovers evident marks of improvement — to conquer the habits of any fault, which, though not so scandalous in the eyes of the world, may be equally inconsistent with real piety. — Take the love of money, for instance. How reluctantly, if at all, is covetousness extirpated from the heart, where it has long been rooted! The imperfect convert has a conviction on his mind, nay, he has a feeling in his heart, that there is no such thing as being a Christian without liberality. This he adopts, in common with other just sentiments, and speaks of it as a necessary evidence of sincerity. He has gotten the whole Christian theory by heart, and such parts of it as do not trench upon this long-indulged corruption, he more or less brings into action. But in this tender point, though the profession is cheap, the practice is costly. An occasion is brought home to him, of exercising the grace he has been commending. He acknowledges its force, he does more, he feels it. If taken at the moment, something considerable might be done; but if any delay intervene, that delay is fatal; far from feeling, he begins to calculate. Now there is a cooling property in calculation, which freezes the warm

current that sensibility had set in motion. The old habit is too powerful for the young convert, yet he flatters himself that he has at once exercised charity and discretion. He takes comfort both from the liberal feeling which had resolved to give the money, and the prudence which had saved it, laying to his heart the flattering unction, that he has only spared it for some more pressing demand, which, when it occurs, will again set him on feeling, and calculating, and saving.

Some well-meaning persons unintentionally confirm this kind of error. They are so zealous on the subject of sudden conversion, that they are too ready to pronounce, from certain warm expressions, that this change has taken place in their acquaintance, while evident symptoms of an unchanged nature continue to disfigure the character. They do not always wait till an alteration in the habits has given that best evidence of an interior alteration. They dwell so exclusively on miraculous changes, that they leave little to do for the convert, but to consider himself as an inactive recipient of grace; not as one who is to exhibit, by the change in his life, that mutation, which the divine Spirit has produced on his heart. This too common error appears to arise, not only from enthusiasm, but partly from want of insight into the human character, of which habits are the ground-work, and in which right habits are not less the

effect of grace for being gradually produced. We cannot, indeed, purify ourselves, any more than we can convert ourselves, it being equally the work of the Holy Spirit to infuse purity, as well as the other graces, into the heart; but it rests with us to exercise this grace, to reduce this purity to a habit, else the Scriptures would not have been so abundant in injunctions to this duty.

"We must hate sin," says Bishop Jeremy Taylor, "in all its dimensions, in all its distances, and in every angle of its reception." St. Paul felt this scrupulousness of Christian delicacy to such an extent, that, in intimating the commission of certain enormities to the church of Ephesus, he charged that *they should not be so much as named among them.* This great master in the science of human nature, a knowledge perfected by grace, was aware that the very mention of some sins might be a temptation to commit them; he would not have the mind intimate with the thought, nor the imagination in contact with the expression, nor the tongue familiar with the sound. He who knew all the minuter entrances, as well as the broader avenues to the corrupt heart of man, knew how much safer it is to avoid than to combat, how much easier is retreat than victory. He was aware, that purity of heart and thought could alone produce purity of life and conduct.

From the unhappy want of this early habit of restraint, many, who are become sincerely pious, find it very difficult to extricate their minds from certain associations established by former habits. Corrupt books and evil communications have at once left a sense of abhorrence on their hearts, with an indelible impression on their memory. They find it almost impossible to get rid of sallies of imagination, which, though they once admired as wit, they now consider as little less than blasphemy. The will rejects them; but they cling to the recollection with fatal pertinacity. Vices, not only of the conduct, but of the imagination, long indulged, leave a train of almost inextinguishable corruptions behind them. These are evils, of which even the reformed heart does not easily get clear. He who repents suddenly, will too often be purified slowly. A corrupt practice may be abolished, but a soiled imagination is not easily cleansed.

We repeat, that these rooted habits, even after the act has been long hated and discontinued, may persist in tormenting him who has long repented of the sin, so as to keep him to the last in a painful and distressing doubt as to his real state; but if this doubt continue to make him more vigilant, and to keep alive his humility, the uneasiness it causes may be more salutary than a greater confidence of his own condition. Many have complained, after years

of sincere reformation, that they did not possess that peace and consolation which religion promises; not suspecting, that their long adherence to wrong habits may naturally darken their views and cloud their enjoyments. Surely the man whose mind has abandoned itself for years to improper indulgences has little right to complain, if bitterness accompany his repentance, if dejection break in on his peace. Surely he has little right to murmur, if those consolations are refused to him, which, in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, are sometimes withheld from good men, who have never been guilty of his irregularities in conduct, who have never indulged his disorders of heart and mind. When we see holy men, to whom this cheerful confidence is sometimes denied, or from whom, in the agonies of dissolving nature, it is withdrawn, shall they whose case we have been considering, complain, if theirs are not all halcyon days, if their closing hour is rather contrite than triumphant? But this, if it be not a state of joy, may be equally a state of safety.

The duty of keeping up this sense of purity is of great extent. One of the many uses of prayer is, that, by the habit of breathing out our inmost thoughts to God, the sense of his being, the consciousness of his presence, the idea that his pure eye is immediately upon us, imparts a temporary purity to the soul, which it vainly aims to maintain in an equal degree in its in-

tercourse with mankind. The beatitude of the promised vision of God is more immediately annexed to this grace; and it is elsewhere said, "that every one who hath this hope, purifieth himself, as He is pure." The holy felicity of the creature is thus made to depend on its assimilation with the Creator. There is a beautiful intimation of the purity of God in the order of construction in the prayer taught by our Saviour. We pray that *his name may be hallowed*, that is, that our hearts, and the hearts of all men, may honour his holy name; may be deeply impressed with a sense of his purity and holiness, before we proceed to the subsequent petitions. We thus invest our minds with this preparatory sentiment, in order to sanctify what we are about to implore. In addition to the necessity of stated prayer for the promotion of purity, it may be observed, that if, by habitual devotion, we bend our thoughts into that course, they will in time almost voluntarily pursue it. The good effect of prayer will, on our return to society, be much increased by the practice of occasionally darting up to Heaven a short ejaculation, a laudatory sentence, or some brief spontaneous effusion. This will assist to stir up the flame which was kindled by the morning sacrifice, and preserve it from total extinction before that of the evening is offered up. We may learn from the profane practice of some, that an ejaculation takes as little time, and ob-

trudes less on notice, than an oath or an exclamation. It implores, in as few words, the same divine power for a blessing, whom the other obtests for destruction.

One great benefit of science is allowed to be derived from its habituating the mind to shake off its dependence upon sense. Devout meditation, in like manner, accustoms it not to fly for support to sensible and material things, but to rest in such as are intellectual and spiritual. By a general neglect of serious thinking, virtue is sometimes withered and decayed in minds where it is not torn up by the roots; there remains in them that vital sap which may still, upon habitual cultivation, not only vegetate, but produce fruit.

One great obstacle to habitual meditation must not be passed over. It is the pernicious custom of submitting to the uncontrolled dominion of a roving imagination. This prolific faculty produces such a constant budding of images, fancies, visions, conjectures, and conceits, that she can subsist plentifully on her own independent stock. She is perpetually wandering from the point to which she promised to confine herself when she set out; is ever roaming from the spot to which her powerless possessor had threatened to pin her down. We retire with a resolution to reflect: Reason has no sooner marshalled her forces, than this undisciplined run-away escapes from duty, one

straggler after another joins the enemy, or brings home some foreign impertinence. While we meant to indulge only a harmless reflection, we are brought under subjection to a whole series of reveries of different characters and opposite descriptions. Fresh trains obliterate our first speculations, till the spirit sinks into a sort of deliquium. We have nothing for it, but resolutely to resist the enfeebling despot. Let us stir up some counteracting force: let us fly to some active employment which shall break the charm, and dissolve the pleasant thraldom. No matter what, so it be innocent and opposite. We shall not cure ourselves by the sturdiest resolution not to do this thing which is complained of, unless we compel ourselves to do something else. Courageous exertion is the only conqueror of irresolution: vigorous action the only supplanter of idle speculation.

Habits are not arbitrary systems and predetermined schemes. They are not always laid down deliberately as plans to be pursued, but steal upon us insensibly; insinuate themselves into a train of successive repetitions, till we find ourselves in bondage to them, before we are aware they have gotten any fast hold over us. But if rooted bad habits are of such difficult extirpation, that, as we have already observed, they not only destroy the peace of him who continues them, but embitter the very penitence of him who has forsaken them, there is a class

of beings in whom they are not yet inveterate. If I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, never could they be employed to a more important purpose, than in representing to my youthful readers the blessedness of avoiding such habits now, as may take a whole life to unlearn.

O, you to whom opening life is fresh, and gay, and tempting! you who have yet your path to choose, whose hearts are ingenuous, and whose manners amiable, in whom, if wrong propensities discover themselves, yet evil habits are not substantially formed — could you be made sensible, at a less costly price than your own experience, that though, through the mercy of God, the long-erring heart may hereafter be brought to abhor its own sin, yet the once-initiated mind can never be made to unknow its knowledge, nor to unthink its thoughts; never can be brought to separate those combinations which it once too fondly cherished: — how much future regret, how much incurable sorrow, might you spare yourselves! If you would but reflect that though, in respect of the past, you may become inwardly penitent, you cannot become, as you now are, outwardly innocent, and that no repentance can restore your present happy ignorance of practised evil, — you would then keep clear of a bondage from which you perceive the older and the wiser do not, because they cannot, commonly emancipate themselves.

But, supposing a young man is so happy as to escape the grosser corruptions, yet, if he have a turn to wit and ridicule, he should be singularly on his guard against the false credit which ludicrous associations will obtain for him in certain societies. An indelicate but pointed jest, a combination of some light thought with some scriptural expression, a parody which makes a serious thing ridiculous, or a sober one absurd, — these are instruments by no means harmless, not only to him who handles them, but also in the hands of subalterns and copyists, who, having, perhaps, no faculty but memory, and seldom using memory but for mischief, retain with joy, and circulate from vanity, what was at first uttered with mere random thoughtlessness. Profane dunces are the busy echoes of the loose wit of others. With little talent for original mischief, but devoting that little to the worst purposes, they pick up a kind of literary livelihood on the stray sarcasms and fugitive bon mots of others, and are maintained on what the witty throw away. If even in the first instance there were nothing wrong in the thing itself, there is mischief in the connexion. Whatever serves to append a light thought to a serious one, is unsafe: both have, by frequent citation, been so accustomed to appear together, that when, in a better frame of mind, the good one is called up, the corrupt associate never fails to present itself unbidden, and, like

Pharaoh's blasted corn, devours the wholesome ear.

"Man," says one of the most sagacious observers of man, Dr. Paley, "is a bundle of habits." The more we attend to them, the more distinctly we shall perceive those which are right, and the more dexterity we shall acquire in establishing them. In setting out in our moral course, we can make little progress, unless we suffer ourselves to be governed by certain rules; but when the rules are once worked into habits, they in a manner govern *us*. We lose the sense of that restraining power which was at first unpleasant, though self-imposed. To illustrate this by an instance: — The accomplished orator is not fettered by recurring to the laws of the grammarian, nor the canons of the dialectician, though it was by being habitually trained in their respective schools, that he acquired both his accuracy and argument. Yet, while he is speaking, it never occurs to him, that there are such things in the world as grammar or logic. The rules are become habits, they have answered their end, and are dismissed.

If we consider the force of habit on amusements: — stated diversions enslave us more by the custom of making us feel the want of them, than by any positive pleasure they afford. By being incessantly pursued, they diminish in their power of delighting; yet such is the plastic power of habit, and such the yielding substance

of our minds, that they become arbitrary wants, absolute articles, not of luxury, but of necessity. Strange! that what is enjoyed without pleasure cannot be discontinued without pain! The very hour when, the place where, the sight of those with whom they have been partaken, present associations which we feel a kind of difficulty and uneasiness in separating. We are partly cheated into this imaginary necessity, by seeing the eagerness with which others pursue them. Yet, if it were not an artificial necessity, a want not arising from the constitution of our nature, those would be unhappy who are deprived of them, or rather, who never enjoyed them. There is a respectable society of Christians among us who carry the restriction of diversions to the widest extent. Yet among the number of amiable, virtuous, and well-instructed young Quakers, whom I have known, I have always found them as cheerful and as happy as other people. Their cheerfulness was perhaps more intellectual than mirthful; but their happiness never appeared to be impeded by complaints at the privation of pleasures to which habit had not enslaved them — a habit which, when carried too far, destroys the very end of pleasure, that of invigorating the mind by relaxing it.

It is a proof that the Apostle considered conversion in general a gradual transformation, when he spoke of the renewing of the inward man *day by day;* this seems to intimate that

good habits, under the influence of the Spirit of God, are continually advancing the growth of the Christian, and conducting him to that maturity which is his consummation and reward. The grace of repentance, like every other, must be established by habit. Repentance is not completed by a single act, it must be incorporated into our mind, till it become a fixed state, arising from a continual sense of our need of it. *Forgive us our trespasses* would never have been enjoined as a daily petition, if daily repentance had not been necessary for daily sins. The grand work of repentance, indeed, accompanies the change of heart; but that which is purified will not, in this state of imperfection, necessarily remain pure. While we are liable to sin, we must be habitually penitent.

A man may give evidence of his possessing many amiable qualities, without our being able to say, therefore, he is a good man. His virtues may be constitutional, their motives may be worldly. But when he exhibits clear and convincing evidence, that he has subdued all his inveterate bad habits, weeded out rooted evil propensities; when the miser is grown largely liberal, the passionate become meek, the calumniator charitable, the malignant kind; when every bad habit is not only eradicated, but succeeded by its opposite quality, we would conclude that such a change could only be effected by power from on high — we would not scruple

to call that man religious. But, above all, there must be a change wrought in the secret course of our thoughts; without this interior improvement the abandonment of any wrong practice is no proof of an effectual alteration. This, indeed, we cannot make a rule by which to judge others, but it is an infallible one by which to judge ourselves. Certain faults are the effect of certain temptations, rather than of that common depravity natural to all. But a general rectification of thought, a sensible revolution in the secret desires and imaginations of the heart, is perhaps the least equivocal of all the changes effected in us. This is not merely the cure of a particular disease, but the infusion of a sound principle of life and health, the general feeling of a renovated nature, the evidence of a new state of constitution.

Candid Christians, however, who know experimentally the power of habit, who are aware of the remainders of evil in the best men, will not rashly pronounce that he, who, while he is struggling with some long-cherished corruption, falls into an occasional aberration from the path he is endeavouring to follow, is therefore not religious.

If our bad habits have arisen from dangerous associations, we must dissolve the intercourse, if we would obviate the danger. Good impressions may have been made on the heart, yet the indulged thought, and especially the allowed

sight of that object which once melted down our better resolutions, may melt them again. If we would conquer an invading enemy, we must not only fight him in the field, but cut off his provisions. It may be difficult, but nothing should repel the effort but what is impossible. Now in this there is no impossibility, because the thing not being placed out of our reach, there needs only the concurrence of the will. If we humour this wayward will, it is at our peril. What we persist in indulging, we shall every day find more difficult to restrain. Perhaps on our not resisting the very next temptation, will depend the future colour of our life — the very possibility of future resistance. That which is now in our power, may, by repeated rejection, be judicially placed beyond it. Infirmity of purpose produces perpetual relapses. Temptation strengthens as resistance weakens. We create, by criminal indulgences, an imbecility in the will, and then plead the weakness, not which we found, but made. Half measures produce more pain and no success. They are compounded of desire and regret, of appetite and fear, of indulgence and remorse. While we are balancing, conditioning, temporising, negotiating with conscience, we might be singing *Te Deum* for the victory.

What force we take from the will by every repetition, we give to the habit. A faint endeavour ends in a sure defeat. Temptation be-

coming more importunate, if its incursions are not resisted, if its attacks are not repelled, the habit will get final possession of the mind; encouragement will invite repetition; where it has been once entertained, it will find a ready way; where it has been received with familiarity, expulsion will soon become difficult, and afterwards impossible. The Holy Spirit, whose aid perhaps we have faintly invoked, and firmly rejected, is withdrawn. But if we are sincere in the invocation, we shall be firm in the resistance; if we are fervent in the resolution, we shall be triumphant in the conflict.

What we have insisted on is the more important, because all progressive goodness consists in habits; and virtuous habits, begun and carried on here with increasing improvement and multiplied energies, are susceptible of eternal proficiency. When we are assured that the effect of habits will not cease with life, but be carried into eternity, it gives such an enlargement to the ideas, such an expansion to the soul, that it seems as if every hour were lost in which we are not beginning or improving some virtuous habit.

As we were originally made in the image of God, so shall we, by the renovation of our minds, of which our improved habits is the best test, be restored, in an enlargement of our moral powers, to a nearer resemblance of Him. Were it not that there is a participation, in all rational

minds, of the same qualities in kind, though infinitely different in degree, the perfections of God would not so repeatedly be held out in Scripture as objects of our imitation. It would have been absurd to have said, "As he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy." — "Be ye holy, for I am holy," would not have been a reasonable command, unless holiness and purity had been one common moral quality of the nature, though unspeakably distant in the proportion between that perfect Being from whom whatever is good is derived, and the imperfect creature who derives it. Surely it is not too much to say, that though we can only attain that low measure, of which our weak and sinful nature is capable, yet still to aim at imitating those perfections, is a desire natural to the renewed heart: and it may be considered as a symptom that no such renovation has taken place, when no such desire is felt.

How could we attempt to trace the perfections of the divine nature, if he had not stamped on our mind some idea of those perfections? We may bring these notions practically home to our own bosoms, possessing, as we do, not only natural ideas of the divine rectitude, but having these notions highly rectified, and confirmed by the Scripture representation of God; if, instead of adopting abstract reason for a rule of judging, which is often too unsubstantial for our grasp, we set ourselves to consider what

such a perfect Being is likely to approve, or condemn, in human conduct, and then comparing not only our deductions, but our practice, with the Gospel, adopt or reject what that approves or condemns.

## CHAP. XX.

### ON THE INCONSISTENCY OF CHRISTIANS WITH CHRISTIANITY.

WE have, in three former chapters*, ventured to address a class of Christians whose lives are decorous, and whose manners are amiable; but who, from the want of having imbibed the vital spirit of Christianity, and having, therefore, formed their principles on imperfect models, seem to have fallen short of that excellence of which their characters are susceptible.

We presume now to address a very different class; persons acknowledging, indeed, the great truths of Christianity, but living either in the neglect of the principles they profess, or in practical opposition to the theory they maintain; yielding to the tyranny of passion or of pleasure, governed by the appetite or the caprice of the moment, and going on in a careless inattention to the duties inculcated by an authority they recognise. The lives of the persons previously considered are commonly better than their profession, the lives of those now under

* "An Enquiry why some Good Sort of People are not better."

contemplation are worse. These seem to have more faults, the other more prejudices. The others are satisfied to be stationary; these are not aware that they are retrograde. The former are in a far better state; but there is hope that the latter may find out that they are in a bad one. The one rest in their performances, with little doubt of their safety; the other, with a blind security, rest in the promises, without putting themselves in the way to profit by them.

If the whole indivisible scheme of Christianity could be split into two portions, and either half were left to the option of these classes; those formerly noticed would adopt the commandments from an assurance of being saved by their obeying them; these under present consideration would choose the creed, from a notion that its mere adoption would go near to exonerate them from personal obedience. The others intend to earn heaven by their defective works: these, overlooking the necessity of holiness, flatter themselves, when they think at all, with the cheap salvation of a mental assent. We all desire to be finally saved. There is but one opinion about the end; we only differ about the means. Many fly to the merits of the Redeemer to obtain happiness for themselves hereafter, who do not desire his Spirit to govern their lives now, though he has so repeatedly declared, that he will not save us without renovating us. To suppose that we shall possess hereafter what

we do not desire here, that we shall complete then, what we do not think of beginning now, is among the inconsistencies of many who pass muster under the generic title of Christians.

The contest between heaven and earth seems to be reduced to one point, *which* shall possess the heart of man. The bent of our affections decides on the object of our pursuit. When they are rightly turned by his powerful hand, God has the predominance. It is the grand design of his word, of his Spirit, of all his dispensations, whether providential or spiritual, to restore us to himself, to recover the heart which sin has estranged from him. Where these instruments fail, the original bias governs, and the world has the entire possession.

Prospective prudence is esteemed a mark of wisdom by the world, and he who possessed the wisdom which is from above, observes, that "the prudent man foreseeth." Here the Bible and the world appear at first sight to be in strict accordance; but they differ materially, both as to the distance and the object of their forecast. How prudent do we reckon that man who denies himself present expenses, and waves present enjoyments, that he may more effectually secure to himself future fortune! We observe that his discreet self-denial will be amply rewarded by the increasing means of after-indulgence. But if this very man were to extend his views still further, and look for the remuneration of

his abstinence, not to a future day, but to a future life, he would not, with his worldly friends, advance his character for wisdom. While he looks to a distant point of time he is commended, but he forfeits the commendation if he overlooks all time, and defers the fruition of his hope, till time shall be no more.

It is indeed this partial looking forward, this fixing the eye on some point of aggrandisement, or wealth, or some other distinction, which obstructs our view of the final prospect; or it is the excess of immediate gratification, the delights of sense, the blandishments of the world, which prevent us even from thinking of it. While the sensualist incloses himself in a narrow circle, beyond which his eye does not penetrate, the Christian, like the mariner, steers his course not by his sight but his compass. In any imminent distress, indeed, men almost naturally fly to their Maker. It is rather an impulse than a principle. Yet it is in prosperity that we most need his assistance. Success, which is perhaps more eminently the hour of peril, is more rarely the hour of prayer. There is an intoxication attending on prosperous fortune, especially while it is new, which diverts the spirits from communication with the Father of spirits. The slackening of devotion under success seems to imply a conviction that, prosperity being a gift of God, our prayers have been heard; we have obtained his blessing, and, having the end of

our prayers granted, we insensibly lessen our endeavours to please Him whom our success induces us to believe that we have already pleased. Thus, having made things even, men seem to set out on a new career; they plan new indulgences, additional projects of splendour, or of gratification; they assiduously multiply those pleasant instances of obedience which the poet has flatteringly told us we give when we "enjoy." But the object of enjoyment is not seldom the instrument of destruction. Anacreon was choked by a grape-stone.

But, if prayer to the Fountain of all good *is* occasionally offered up by the negligent Christian, it is not likely to be heard, because it is not his own prayer. We do not mean, because it is the composition of another; that, as it does not lessen its value, does not obstruct its acceptance. If the feelings go along with the petitions, they will be heard; if the affections are bound up with the words, they will be accepted. It is not because they are forms, but because the little interest taken in them renders them mere forms. It is not because they are pre-composed, but because they are used with constraint — are repetitions, not effusions. It is using them without that condition of mind, without that cordial, voluntary approach to the divine presence, to which is annexed the gracious promise of being in *no wise* cast out; of that state of mind which David suggested when he said, "My heart (not

my lips) hath talked of Thee:" when, in answer to the command, "Seek ye my face," warm and instant from the heart he fervently replied, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

If it be objected, that we can no more pray up to scriptural expressions, than we can live up to scriptural injunctions, does not the one, equally with the other, indicate the high aspiring nature of religion? Does it not remind us, that our aims must be always more lofty than the possibility of our attainments; that if the one be hitherto low and earthly, the other must be high and heavenly; bounded by no limits, restrained by no measures, but improving with our moral improvement, strengthening with our spiritual strength?

You do not deny that "the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation," because it is asserted by an authority you respect. But to whom is it such a power? You reply from your memory, "To all them that believe." But of what use is a belief that is obviously uninfluential? You are unconsciously falling into the very error of the fanatic whom you so justly condemn. Like him, you value yourself upon your full assent to the truth of Christianity. You go beyond him, for you profess to have reason as well as faith on your side. But is not that an irrational faith which professes to believe, that a principle is productive of salvation, and yet to rest contented while you are not

governed by that principle? You bring your reason and your will into the ordinary transactions of life; the one impels, and the other guides, in almost all concerns except that one grand concern, where the impulse and the guidance are incomparably the most important. You allow, indeed, in a general way, that the thoughts and pursuits of religion are the most worthy of attention, and then act as if you held no such opinion, made no such avowal.

It is a wonderful instance of the union of justice and mercy in God, that in the very act of making sin the marked object of his displeasure, he makes the penitent offender the chosen object of his compassion. But revelation will afford no shelter to those who screen themselves under its promises, while they live in opposition to its laws; to those who desire to retain their vices, without relinquishing their hopes; who take refuge in the very mercy they are abusing; who think they exalt the efficacy of grace, by believing it will cancel, not only all the sins they have committed, but all they intend to commit. The truth is, if they really believe God, it is only when he promises. But shall he not also be believed when he threatens, or shall we desire him to abrogate half his word, that while we are violating one part, the other may confirm our security? Is not this subterfuge as much an abdication of common sense, as a contempt of divine justice?

Unhallowed passions too frequently enlist both wit and argument into their service, the one laughs at their excesses, the other reasons them away. Wit is no longer employed in her rightful office, to decorate virtue, but to ridicule her. Reason is no longer called in to control appetite, but to plead for it. Indulgence confirms its dominion. As the empire of sense is fortified, that of reason declines. Even God is audaciously, though, perhaps, gaily arraigned, for having made corrupt inclinations natural, and then punishing their indulgence; as if he had not given reason to restrain, as if he had not bestowed religion to control them.

It is not an uncommon practice to assent to the truth of Scripture, and even to approve and recommend it, without *really* believing it; for the test of belief is to make it the rule of judging ourselves, and endeavouring to act as if we expected to be judged by it. The Christian doctrines will always produce Christian affections and dispositions in the mind, in the proportion in which they are understood, in the degree in which they are cordially embraced. The temper and conduct of the Christian is a faithful reflection of the doctrines of Christianity; and the improvement of his life is the only evidence of his having received its truths into his heart.

Of all the ingredients of which our intellectual and spiritual character is compounded,

that is the most doubtful, the most unfixed, and the most easily shaken, which is in reality the basis of all our other principles, as well as the foundation of all our future hopes — we mean faith. It is the want of this living root which accounts for all the deformities in the mind, all the anomalies in the character of man. Disguise it as we will — and we confine not the charge to the profligate, or even to the negligent — it is practical unbelief which so sadly depresses our moral standard.

Yet the negligent in practice are not seldom confident in the profession of their faith. As they are not often troubled with any doubt of themselves, of course they institute no very deep inquiry whether they do sincerely believe the promises of Christianity. But, however frivolous *they* may deem the scrutiny, it was once thought to be a matter worthy of a serious inquiry among Christians, whether their hopes were well founded. Better men than many who now reckon themselves good, entertained doubts of their own state, and could not rest till they came to something like decision on this momentous question. Is, then, that sober inquiry, which was in them the truest mark of prudence, now to be treated as a needless scrupulosity, if not as an evidence of an unsound mind? Are the doctrines of the Gospel on which they bestowed so much thought and labour unworthy of yours? Is that which

was to them so serious a concern as to demand a combination of their best faculties and their most fervent endeavours, become so easy as to be comprehended at a glance, and adopted in a moment? Are the difficulties, which cost them so much reflection, prayer, and self-denial, miraculously removed, and made smooth for you? Are things so altered, that while they worked out their salvation with fear and trembling, you are secure of an easy, indolent, almost unsolicited salvation? Are corrupt human nature and the requisitions of the Gospel now so suddenly accommodated to each other? Are sin and safety grown so congruous? Is it become so natural to fallen creatures to be reconciled to God and goodness, without that long and serious process which was once thought so indispensable to its accomplishment? Is that superinduced principle which the most acute nation in the world accounted "foolishness," and the most perverse people a "stumbling-block," become to you so easy of apprehension, so accessible to your reach, so facilitated to your corruptions, so certain of attainment, as to supersede the labour of examination, as to be acquired without the trouble of pursuit? If to *you* the end is made sure, with the utter ignorance of the way, and a general neglect of the means; if *you* find that path clear, which they found intricate; if *you* obtain, without seeking, that assurance, by the

bare promise of which they were supported; if all this be really your happy case, it must have been achieved by some power which has not been before revealed, by some miracle which neither the Old nor the New Testament has either recorded or predicted.

You would do well, then, besides looking back to the oracles of truth, to inquire of your authorised instructors, if there has been any change effected in the requirements of Christianity, any deductions made in its demands, any facilities introduced into its scheme, any revelation by which the old impediments have been removed, and a shorter cut to heaven cleared out? Consult some real Christians of your acquaintance; inquire if *they*, despising and forsaking the good old way, found repentance, pardon, holiness, victory over the world, and acceptance with God, so slight, so rapid, yet so certain a thing? Ask, if they became Christians by chance or by inheritance, if they were "renewed in the spirit of their minds" by the mere form of baptism? Inquire if their entrance into a religious life cost them no sacrifice, if their attainments were accidental, if they maintained the ground once gained without effort, if they improved it without prayer, if they were established in it without divine assistance?

The truth is, the persons in question either do not think the defect of faith a fundamental

error, or they suppose they believe when they do not. When this last is the case, they rest satisfied in their mistake; for people do not seek to extricate themselves from a doubt in which they do not feel entangled. It is, however, practical unbelief which quenches the vital flame of virtue.

Unbelief is not, as you are too ready to suppose, merely one among the many evils of the heart, but it is the root and principle of them all. That faith is the foundation of virtue is implied to have been clearly understood by the Apostle, when he speaks of "the *obedience* of faith."

How hotly do we resent it, if *our* veracity is suspected! How indignantly do our hearts rise, if our fellow-creatures do not believe our word on occasions the most trivial! Yet we do not tremble at the idea of not believing the word of Omnipotence: yet do his promises excite no ardent desires in our hearts after the blessings they reveal. And could this possibly be the case, if we confidently credited the truth of the promises?

If men only suspect there is some new road which may lead to fame or fortune, or any desirable acquisition, how sedulous are they in their inquiries after it, how anxious to ascertain its probability, how zealous to turn the information to their profit! But when *this* grand concern is in question, so far from investigating,

they take it for granted, they assume, not only that the thing is true, but that their interest in it is safe. It scarcely costs them a thought, they are seldom embarrassed with a doubt. So far from reflecting how the difficulties which lie in the way may be removed, they do not inquire whether they exist, much less what they are; and with those who would point them out, they evade the subject to save the trouble. We need look no further for the solution of our indifference, than that we do not earnestly desire the promised felicity because of our practical incredulity.

If an intelligent Chinese had been made acquainted with the high privileges and sublime hopes of a Christian — what advantages he possesses here, and what prospects he has in reversion, not contingent, but certain, provided he turned his advantages to the securing of his prospects; what promises had been made him from an authority he allowed, and by a veracity he trusted; — what a glorious people would he expect to find in a society of such highly-privileged beings! Would he not look for cordial obedience to *his* laws in whose will they daily express a complete acquiescence? — for unbounded love and charity among creatures who periodically confessed that their own sins could not be forgiven, if they forgave not the sins of others? — for a gratitude, among creatures who recognised one common redemption, which

should bear some little proportion to his love by whom such an astonishing redemption had been wrought? Would he not conclude that nothing could be wanting to their happiness but an entrance on that immortality for which they must be so well prepared — nothing wanting to their perfection, but the visible presence of Him whom they acknowledge to be its source and centre? and that in the mean time they were living the life of saints, preparatory to their commencing that of angels?

But when, on a personal intercourse, he observed that the lives of so many beings, the essence of whose religion is love, was a scene of strife and emulation — that this community of Christians which he thought, like the city of Jerusalem, was at unity with itself, had rather be at unity with any thing than with each other — split into parties and torn asunder by conflicting interests! — when he saw that the professions of a religion, founded in humility and self-denial, could be proud without reproach, and voluptuous without discredit; when he saw, in so many other respects, the inconceivable distance between our lives and our pattern, our hopes and our aims, would he not believe the whole had been a misrepresentation? Would he not rejoice, like a true patriot, to find that there was less difference between the inhabitants of Pekin and London than between the professor of Christianity and the Gospel from which he took his

rule? Would not this be his natural inference, either that Christianity is not true, or that its avowed disciples do not believe it? When he compared their actual indulgences with their exalted expectances, would he not believe that their religion was founded on a proclamation for present enjoyment, and not on a promise of future blessedness? In any event, would he conceive that eternal glory was to be obtained without an effort, I had almost said without a wish?

## CHAP. XXI.

### EXPOSTULATION WITH THE INCONSISTENT CHRISTIAN.

THE most valuable truths, though known, are useless, if not applied. Though men were acquainted with the magnetic power of the loadstone before the Christian era, it remained an object of idle admiration, till within a very few centuries. The practical use of the needle being at length found out, its application to its true end gave mankind access to unknown regions, and opened to them a new world. If such were the application of religious knowledge to its proper end, it would, indeed, open to us a world, in which, not only one, but every adventurer might be rewarded, not with discovery merely, but with possession.

To this unseen world God has shown us the way by his word, has smoothed that way by his grace, has promised us the direction of his Spirit; has given us free access by his Son, revealing him to us at once, as our propitiation and our pattern. Shall we not, then, thankfully embrace this propitiation, and keep this pattern before our eyes? And though our nearest ap-

proaches will be infinitely distant, let us come as near to it as we can, and let us frequently try, by the only true touchstone, whether we have more receded or approached. If we find our deflection has been greater since the last examination, let the discovery put us upon praying more fervently, watching more vigilantly, and labouring more earnestly. If we have gained any ground, let us try to secure our advantages by pushing our progress. What a low standard, and yet it was a high one in his estimation, did he propose, who said to his friend, "If thou art not Socrates, yet live as one who would be glad to be Socrates!" To what an elevated pitch were *his* views raised, who, disdaining an inferior model, said, "Be ye like minded with Christ!"

Every degree of goodness is only a ray from the central perfections of God. There is no shadow of right in any of his creatures, but is indicative of his immeasurable goodness. The human virtues had originally a stronger resemblance to, and more intimate correspondence with, the Being from which they emanated, but by man's apostasy, the analogy was not only impaired but nearly lost. Yet a sufficient knowledge of what is good, an ample power of judging, remains to us, to convince us, that religion is a very reasonable principle, that it is addressed to our understandings as well as to our affections. God, by the revelation of himself and his

purposes, does not destroy, but strengthens, our natural notions of rectitude, our rational ideas of justice, our native feelings of truth and equity. The Scripture account of the moral perfections of God, and of the manner in which he will judge the world, is consonant to those notions which he has implanted in us. Christianity exalts, clears, and purifies the light of reason, ennobles and elevates the dictates of natural conscience, but does not contradict them — does not subvert our ideas of justice, nor overturn our innate sense of right and wrong. Our nature, though full of perverseness in the will, is not so preposterous in her judgment, as to believe that a revelation from God would ever teach a law in direct opposition to natural justice; that the illumination of the Gospel was meant to extinguish "the candle of the Lord" set up in every human bosom. God would be inconsistent with himself, if he gave us the light of reason, dim indeed, but still a light, and then gave us a revelation, not to clear that dimness, not to enlighten that comparative darkness, but to oppose, eclipse, extinguish it.

To this capacity of judging, to this power of determining, and to your profession of faith, we venture to appeal. We are not arguing with you as with persons who deny the truth of Christianity, but addressing you as avowed believers, who neglect the application of that truth which the infidel denies. We do not propose

any disallowed scheme; we do not offer any rejected doctrine, any disputed opinions; we do not invite your submission to any authority which you do not acknowledge. We suggest nothing but what your understandings assent to, nothing but what you profess to believe. Yet these truths you virtually disavow, this authority you actually renounce, this creed you practically subvert, if they do not furnish the ground of your conduct. You acknowledge all the verities of the Bible, but your lives are unaltered. Your hearts are impressible by all the tender human affections; awake to all "the charities of father, son, and brother;" — Why are they untouched, just where they ought to be most sensible, languid, where they should be vigorous, dead, where they should show most vital energy?

There is in this conduct a double incongruity. The persons in question not only forbear to exhibit in their own lives those admirable effects which Christianity is so calculated to produce, but they do not like to see them produced to any great extent in others. They are not backward in branding those who exhibit, in their fair proportions, the practical effects of the doctrines they themselves profess to admire, with the suspicion of hypocrisy, or the reproach of extravagance. In the common course of affairs nothing is more censured than *inconsistency*. In religion it is quite otherwise. It is thought

criminal to make no religious profession; yet, to act consistently with that profession, to make the practice square with the principle, in short, to live as we believe, exposes a person to be suspected of a deficiency of sense, or of sincerity; subjects him to a doubt, either of the integrity of his heart, or the sanity of his mind.

Christianity lays down plain rules for the conduct of those who profess it. The Bible is in the hands of this class of professors; but when a portion of it has been carelessly perused, it is considered as having done its office. It is laid down, and the reader, instead of applying to his conduct the law he has been studying, immediately applies to the law of custom, of fashionable acquaintance, of caprice, of appetite, for that rule which, in conversation he would acknowledge, was only to be found in the book he had been reading. In matters of faith, an indefinite assent is yielded; he only desires to be excused from the consequences they involve.

He would, indeed, like to cavil at some points, but an unexamined approbation costs less trouble: so he believes in the gross, occasionally, however, indulging a little levity to show his wit, and a few doubts, to show his discrimination.

We do not act thus on other occasions. The arts we learn we turn to the purpose for which we learned them. The science we acquire, we

apply. The study of geometry is made applicable to practical purposes. The knowledge of mechanics is not studied for its own sake, but for the benefit of those to whom the application brings so many conveniences. The fairest hand-writing would be of little value, if the use did not follow the acquisition. Yet, if religion is not only of more allowed importance, but of more universal application, than all human knowledge put together, why is it not, like that, brought to bear on the purpose for which it was sent, the rectification of the heart and life? If we acknowledge the Bible to be the only unerring road-book to that land to which we are travelling, why, after consulting it in the closet, do we forget it on the journey, not only neglecting the direction it affords, but pursuing contrary paths of our own devising.

It is a spectacle to excite the tenderest commiseration, when we observe the excellent gifts of God to some of his most favoured creatures — when we see the brightest natural faculties improved by high cultivation, together with that degree of acquaintance with religion, which not only expels infidelity, but leads to a certain vague adoption of the Christian creed — when we see men, not only rich in mental endowments, but possessed of hearts glowing with generosity and kindness — when we see such beings as much absorbed in the pursuits of time and sense, as dead to the highest ends of their being, limit-

ing their plans to the present life as completely as if they did not believe in that immortality which yet makes part of their system! — to see them overlooking the excellences which may be attained in this state preparatory to their perfection in a better; — unobservant of that deep basis which God has laid in our very nature for the condition of future blessedness — forgetting how he has not only graciously put us in the way to attain it, but has exhorted, but has invited, us only to *consent*, only to *submit*, to be eternally happy! When we hear the Saviour of sinners condescending to express this tender regret at their reluctance, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," — who can, without sorrow, contemplate such a discrepancy between the practice and the destination, the pursuits and the interests, the low desires and the high possibilities, the unspeakable offers and the incorrigible blindness?

But, in our lapsed humanity, sense, in opposition to faith, is too frequently the dictator. If we see through a glass, and that darkly, it is because the medium is clouded by the breath of sensuality. Appetite is the arbitrary power which renders every appeal to reason and religion fruitless. The pleasures of the present life have matter and substance, and we act as if those of heaven were dreams and visions. Self-love errs only in mistaking its objects, in putting the brief discipline which we are called to exercise

here on a level with eternal suffering; it mistakes in fastening itself on the lower part of our nature, and forgetting that our souls are ourselves.

But surely God did not give his creatures such improveable powers, such strong notices of himself, without some farther end and design than can be perfected in this brief state of being! He never would have given us a nature capable of knowing and loving him here, if it were not part of his scheme that our knowledge and love of him should be perfected in eternity. We are not the creatures of casualty. We did not come into this world by chance, or by mistake; for any uncertain end, or any undetermined purpose, but for a purpose of which we should never lose sight, for an end to which we should have a constant reference; that we might bring glory to God now, and be received by his grace to glory everlasting.

For though all the contributions of all the creatures in existence can add nothing to his inherent glory, yet he has condescended to declare that he will be glorified by us. Instead of which, what mis-shapen ideas do not many form of God! How do they deface the plan of Providence! Were that commodious creed true, that mercy is his exclusive attribute, how safely might we sin on; the profligate would be as secure of pardon and acceptance as the penitent, the profane as the pious, the voluptuous as the

self-denying, the sceptic as the believer, the lovers of pleasure as the lovers of God.

Instead of endeavouring "to be conformed to the image of God," according to his express command, do not too many thus form a God after their own image, by thinking him such a one as themselves? Do they not almost slide into the practice of the Epicureans, who, having made a scheme of ease, indolence, and indulgence, for their conduct, prudently invented gods accommodated to their own taste and habits? In them there was consistency. It was making their faith of a piece with their practice, when they made their deities as careless, as sensual, and as pleasure-loving as themselves. But surely under a pure dispensation, to form a false and unworthy estimate of the character of the Supreme Govenor of the universe, is scarcely less criminal than to deny his existence. Where is the difference between divesting him of his being, and of his perfections?

Our Saviour and his Apostle, in their classification of sins, frequently bring together such as appear to us to have a wide disparity. "Emulation" is classed with "strife," "variances" with "idolatry," "revelling" with "murder." Those "who mind earthly things" are coupled with those "whose end is destruction." In enumerating the offences which shall make his second coming so tremendously awful, Christ ranks the being "overcharged with the cares of

this life"— cares which we are apt to call prudence and industry — with sins, of which Christian industry and prudence would think with abhorrence.

If the apology we make is, that we are governed by example, if we plead the necessity of acting as others, especially as our acquaintance act, we intrench ourselves in excuses which have no analogy with our conduct on other occasions. We are never so disinterested as to think of being sick, or poor, or miserable for company. We never generously plead the necessity of involving ourselves in debt, because our friends are so involved — of being ruined, because those whom we love are ruined. Shall sympathy, civility, imitation, and a social spirit, then, be pleaded only on occasion of mischiefs that are irrevocable, reserved for errors that are irretrievable, for practices, the consequences of which will be irremediable!

It is a low degree in the scale of goodness with which they are contented, who congratulate themselves that they are not worse than others, and a death-blow to the noble ambition of piety when they are contented not to be better. If, indeed, they think they are perfectly happy now, they need look no farther. But before they answer this important question, Are you happy? let them interrogate their own heart. If they ask it fairly, it will answer honestly, *I am not happy.* Happiness is incompatible with the

state of their minds, with the nature of their pursuits. The very fondness for variety proceeds from an internal sense of indigence. They are satiated without being satisfied. The ever-renewed and ever-frustrated attempts of the fabled daughters of Danaus, whose labour, a Pagan poet tells us, *was infinite, and their punishment eternal*, is the disappointing life and lot of these mistaken votaries of worldly enjoyment. The prophet annexes to somewhat of the same discouraging pursuit, an awfully explanatory reason, when he represents the error of those who "hew out broken cisterns which hold no water," to have originated in their "forsaking the fountain of living waters."

But even the most careless livers have not lost the natural sense of the moral quality of actions. They can reason upon them; they understand the rules they violate; they retain the perception of excellence; they preserve the feeling of kindness; they had rather be the objects of regard than dislike, if it could be acquired at a cheaper rate than that of forming their conduct by the principles they approve. *They wish they were better*, while they make no effort towards being other than they are. Their very wish for amendment is so cold, so careless, and so slight, that it wants all the characters of repentance, all the energies of resolution, all the sincerity of reformation. While we sometimes hear from these persons, in addition to this wish, a general

declaration that *they hope they shall mend*, we seldom see any step taken in consequence of this profession: on the contrary, they are quieted for the time; they take a sort of heartless comfort in this better taste; they flatter themselves it is a proof they love virtue, though they neglect it. But they do not act thus in what truly interests them. If there is a scheme of amusement in view, the time is accurately settled, the party nicely adjusted, their punctuality is exact, there is neither delay nor excuse. It is only on matters of everlasting interest that they beg leave to postpone what they would not be thought to reject. Among all the countless generations of frail and fallen humanity, incomparably the most numerous community is the sect of *Postponers*. If, as some old divine quaintly observes, "hell is paved with good intentions," may we not say, that the postponers, of which multitudes are found in all ages and in all churches, are the class that has contributed the greatest number of squares to the tesselated pavement? Is it not an inconsistency, common to every member of this sect, to wish that the portion of his life which is gone by had been spent in virtue, while this wish is too feeble to stimulate his future days to those pursuits in which he laments the past were not spent?

You do not act thus inconsistently by any necessity of nature; depraved as the will is, in common with our other faculties, it does not

necessarily rob you of the power of determining; it does not take from you the ability of imploring the strength you want. To choose the good, and to refuse the evil, is yet left to your option. Why do the Scriptures make such repeated and solemn appeals to the will, if its agency were so utterly involuntary? On this will there is no irresistible compulsion. On the supposition that this were not the case, all human laws would be unreasonable, all courts of judicature not only unjust but preposterous, all legal executions absurd as well as inhuman; for would it not be barbarous to punish crimes which the perpetrator was not left at liberty to avoid? In this case Ravaillac would have been guiltless, and Bellingham excusable.

Nor is it your reason which dissuades you from religion. If you would consult its sound and sober dictates, it would point to religion as naturally as the eye points to the object it would investigate, as the needle to its attracting point. It is not your reason, but your corruptions, which turn away your heart from religion, because it tells you that something is to be done in opposition to their sway, something to be opposed contrary to their nature, something to be renounced congenial with their gratification.

It is a fatal mistake to expect to get rid of an evil by trying to become insensible to it. To divert the attention, in order to stupify the conscience, is almost imitating the malefactor

about to be executed, who swallows cordials, which, if they allay his terrors, do so only by deadening his sensibility. Take, then, a distinct view of your state, and of your prospects. Deliberation is valuable, were it only on this ground, that, while you are deliberating, there is an intermission of passion, there is an interval of appetite: as these intermit, better feelings have time to rally, better thoughts to come forward, better principles to struggle for operation.

If, with hearts naturally inclined to evil, (as what heart is not?) and in a world abounding with temptation, you have strayed widely from the strait path, you are not compelled to pursue it. We need continue in sin no longer than we love it. Close not, then, your heart against that grace which is offered to all; it will perfect the work it has once begun, if we do not wilfully oppose its operations. Let us not, therefore, lay *all* the blame on our natural conceptions, as if we were compelled to sink under them. They will, indeed, continue to impede our progress, but, unless aided by our inclination, they will not finally obstruct it. But wilfully to sin on, and yet expect pardon through the merits of our Redeemer, looks like an impious plot to blind the eyes of Omniscience, and to tie the hands of Omnipotence. We shall always have this infallible criterion by which to judge of our state; we may be assured that our sins are not forgiven, if they are not mortified. We need

not pry into our destination in the inscrutable decrees of the Almighty, but in our own rectified affections, our own subdued will. Let us never remit our diligence by any persuasion of our security, nor slacken our obedience by any fond conceit that our names are written in heaven.

But, alas! the soul is full of the body, the intellect is steeped in sense. The spiritual life is immersed in the animal. Reason and appetite, instead of keeping their distinct natures, are in many instances so mixed and incorporated, that it is not always easy to decompose and reduce them to their separate principles. It is want of cordial sincerity which prevents truth from being sought; and where she is not sought, she will not be found. Internal purity of heart, and sanctity of spirit, afford a fairer exhibition of religion, than the most subtle dogmas, and the most zealous debates.

If we seek peace in God, we shall never fail of finding it; if we look for it in the world, it is to look for a clear stream from a polluted source. We have a spirit within us that will occasionally, though unbidden, remind us of our high original, "from what height fallen." How widely have we wandered in search of the good we have lost! We have sought for it in the tumults of ambition, in the pleasures of voluptuousness, in the misleadings of flattery, in our own high imaginations, in the self-gratulations of pride, in the secret indulgence of that

vanity, which probably it has been one part of our pride not to cure but to conceal. Let us begin to seek for it, where alone it is to be found, where alone God has promised it — in the "way" which he has opened, in the "truth" which he has revealed, and in the "life" which he has quickened.

Do not, then, any longer make religion an incidental item in your scheme of life. Do not turn over the consideration of it to chance; make it a part of your daily plan; take it up as a set business; give it an allotted portion in the distribution of your daily concerns, while you admit it as the pervading principle of them all. You carry on no other transaction casually; you do not conduct your profession or manage your estate by fits and starts. You do not expect your secular business will go on well without minding it. You set about it intently; you transact it with a fixed design; you consider it as a definite object. You would not be satisfied with it if it brought you no return, still less would you be satisfied not to know whether it brought any return or not. Yet you are contented as to this great business of life, though you perceive no evidence of its progress. You see no absurdity in a religious profession which leaves you as indigent as it found you. Does it not look as if your sincerity, in the one case, did not keep pace with your earnestness in the other; as if your religion was a shadow, and your secular concerns were the only reality?

Begin, then, to be distinct in your purposes, explicit in your designs, sincere in your pursuits. You profess to read the Scriptures occasionally; if the perusal has hitherto produced no sensible effect, this is only an additional motive for making the incidental practice habitual. Do not intermit it, under pretence that it has produced no benefit. It is a great thing to keep within the use of God's appointed means. If you had not some pleasure in even a casual perusal, you would avoid it altogether. The blessing which has been so long delayed, perhaps has not been cordially requested; when earnestly desired, it will not be finally withheld. Light precedes warmth in the daily course of nature. Begin, then, to consider, that knowledge not turned to profit will be a grand article at the final reckoning. How many thousands have not even made the progress which you have made; have not attained that literal acquaintance with the Bible which you have attained! *They* are utterly, perhaps irreclaimably, ignorant. *You* have laid in, at least in your understanding, a certain though perhaps slender stock of materials, on which the Divine light only waits to shine till you petition for it; that light which, if you will open your eyes to receive it, will shine more and more unto the perfect day. God has assured you in his word, that he "*waits* to be gracious." The compassionate father in the parable moved more eagerly to embrace his son,

than the returning prodigal to meet the parent. He scarcely waited for his protestations; the pardon prevented the confession; he condescended to rejoice even in his *acceptance* of forgiveness.

It is not a new scheme which is proposed to you; it is not an imaginary project, an untried device. There is nothing unreasonable in the hope held out; no elevation in piety but what with the offered aid is attainable; nothing but what multitudes have attained; not merely prophets and saints and holy men, but persons whose cases were as unpromising as yours; men labouring under the same corruptions; disturbed by the same passions, assailed by the same trials, drawn aside by the same temptations, exposed to the same dangerous world; long led astray by its customs, long enslaved by its maxims. The same grace which rescued them is offered to you. The same Spirit which struggled with their hearts is, perhaps, while you are reading these feeble lines, striving with yours. Resist not the impulse. Complete the assimilation. Let not the resemblance be more imperfect in its fairer features than in its more deformed. Imitate their noble resolution. Recollect the glorious promise made, "to him that overcometh." The same power which delivered them waits to deliver you. The ten thousand times ten thousand who now stand before the throne, were not innocent, but penitent — not

guiltless men, but redeemed sinners. The same God waits to be gracious. The same Saviour intercedes. The same Spirit invites. The same heaven is open. Plead that gracious nature, implore that Divine intercessor, invoke that blessed Spirit. Say not it is too late. Early and late are relative, not positive terms. While the door is yet open there is no hour of marked exclusion. So may an inheritance among the saints in light still be yours.

## CHAP. XXII.

### REFLECTIONS OF AN INCONSISTENT CHRISTIAN AFTER A SERIOUS PERUSAL OF THE BIBLE.

I PROFESS to believe that Christianity is true. Its promises are high; but what have been its profits? It is time to inquire into its truth and its advantages. It never, indeed, pledged itself to confer honours or emoluments; but it engaged to bestow benefits of another kind. If the Christian is deceived in these, he has nothing to console him. Now what am I the better for Christianity? It speaks of changing the heart from darkness to light. What illumination has my mind experienced from it? — But here a doubt begins to arise. Am I indeed a Christian? What claims have I to the character?

Is there any material difference, whether I depend on heaven as a thing of course, to those who have been baptized, though they possess no corresponding temper and conduct; or whether I never reflect that there is a heaven, or whether I absolutely disbelieve that there is any such place? Is the distinction so decisive between speculative unbelief, practical infidelity, and total negligence, as that either of them can

afford an assurance of eternal happiness in preference to the other? Yet while the thought of heaven never enters my mind, should I not hotly resent it as an injury, if any one disputed my title to it? Should I not treat him who advised me to a more serious life, as an enemy, and him who suspected I required it, as a caluminator? Is it not, however, worth the inquiry, whether my confidence of obtaining it is well founded; and whether my danger arises from my ignorance or my unfitness?

If the Scriptures be authentic — if, as I have always professed to believe, they indicate a state of eternal happiness, together with the means of attaining to it — then surely not to direct my thoughts to that state, not to apply my attention to those means, is to neglect the state and the things, for which I was sent into the world. Providence, doubtless, intended that every species of being should reach the perfection for which it was created. Shall his only rational creature be the only one which falls short of the end for which he was made? the only one who refuses to reach the top of his nature, who refuses to comply with his original destination?

If I were quite certain that I was not created for such a great and noble end as Christianity has revealed, I should then be justified in acting as a being would naturally act, who has no higher guide than sense, no nobler incentive than appetite, no larger scope than time, no

ampler range than this world. And though I might then regret that my powers and faculties, my capacities and desires, were formed for so low a purpose, and their exercise limited to so brief a space; yet it would not, in that case, be acting consistently to turn my fugitive possessions, and my contracted span, to the best account of present enjoyment.

But if I have indeed, as I profess to have, any faith however low, any hope however feeble, any prospect however faint, is it rational to act in such open opposition to my profession? Is it right or reasonable to believe and to neglect, to avow and to disregard, to profess and to oppose, the same thing? Do I raise my character for that understanding on which I value myself, if, while I make confession of a faith which has been adopted by the wisest men in different ages, my temper is not, like theirs, conformed to it; my will is not, like theirs, subdued to it; my life is not, like theirs, governed by it.

I think this world more certain than the next, because I have the evidence of my senses to its reality, and because its enjoyments are present, visible, tangible. But the same Being who gave my senses gives also reason and faith; and do not these afford to the sincere inquirer other evidence of no less power? Even in many natural things, we receive the evidence of reason as confidently as the testimony of sense. Our reason informs us, that the things we see could

not have been produced without a cause which we do not see: we might as well say they have no being, as that they had no cause — and yet the cause lies as completely out of our reach as the things of another world. The unseen things, then, may be as satisfactorily proved by other arguments, as the things we know are proved by our senses. But the highest evidence of things not seen is faith. Even this principle we admit in worldly things, but reject in spiritual. We should know very little of this earth, if we knew only what we have seen. Now we believe that a multitude of things exist which we never saw, and which few, comparatively, have seen. This is the evidence of faith in the testimony of the relater.

I see persons in the ordinary affairs of life act upon the mere report of authentic information; conduct concerns analogous to those whose success is made known to them by impartial evidence, and act confidently on the relation of credible witnesses; and they would be thought perverse and unreasonable, were not their conduct influenced by such competent testimony. Is it, then, only in the momentous concern of religion where these appropriate evidences are allowed to be incontestable, where a revelation from heaven, where the attestation of undeniable witnesses, has established the truth in the minds of inquiring men beyond a doubt? — is it only where the testimony is the most unquestionable,

and the object the most transcendently important, that neglect is pardonable, that delay is prudent, that indifference is safe?

It is time to arrive at some decision on a question which, if it be any thing, is every thing; which if it be indeed founded in infallible truth, involves consequences so vast, effects so lasting, that all the other concerns of the whole world shrink into nothing, when weighed against my individual concern in this single business.

That thinking mind which enables me to frame these reflections, that sentient spirit which suggests these apprehensions, those irrepressible feelings which drive out my thoughts, and force my speculations beyond the present scene, prove that I have something within me which was made for immortality. If, then, I am once convinced of these truths, can I any longer hesitate to devote my best thoughts to my highest good, my chiefest care to my nearest concern, my most intense solicitude to my everlasting interests?

Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief! Convert my dead faith into an operative principle! Let my sluggish will be quickened, let my reluctant desires give some signs of life; let it be an evidence of the real existence of my faith, that it is not inert.

We talk of the glory of heaven as coolly, and hear of it with as much indifference, as if it were the unalienable birth-right of every nominal Christian, and that our security left no

room for our solicitude. But I now find, on examining it more closely, that the Bible speaks of a thing which Christians of my class neglect to take into the account; a *fitness* for that glory, a spirit prepared for that state, which God has prepared for them that love him. It not only promises them heaven, but quickens their desires after it, qualifies them for the enjoyment of it. Now, can I conscientiously declare that I possess, that I have ever endeavoured to possess, those desires, without which heaven is unattainable; those dispositions, without which, if it could be attained, it would not be a place of happiness? Is it, then, probable, arguing upon merely rational grounds, that God will receive me to his presence there, if I continue to live without him in the world? Will he accept me when I come to die, alienated from him in heart and thought as I have lived?

After all, uncertainty is no comfortable state. It is safer to seek a satisfactory solution to my doubts by serious inquiry, to seek tranquillity to my heart by earnest prayer. It is better to implore the promised aid, to strengthen my vacillating mind, even though I renounce a little present ease, a little temporary pleasure. If, indeed, avoiding to think of the evil would remove it, if averting my eyes from the danger would annihilate it, all would be well. But if, on the contrary, fearing it now, may avert it for ever, common sense, reasonable self-love, mere

human prudence, compel me to make the computation of the relative value of time and eternity. I may, indeed, as I have frequently done, postpone my purpose to some future time. But then I am not so skilled in the doctrine of chances, as to be quite certain that time may ever arrive. He that intends to reform to-morrow, does not repent to-day. When delay is danger, is it not foolish to delay? Where it may be destruction, is it not something worse than folly? I will arise, and go to my Father, &c. &c. &c.

## CHAP. XXIII.

### THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD.

"THE only doctrinal truth," says Bishop Sanderson, "which Solomon insisted on, when he took the whole world for his large but barren text, was, that all is vanity." This was not the verdict of a hermit railing from his cell at pleasures untasted, or at grandeur unenjoyed. Among the sons of men, not one had sought with more unremitted diligence, or had wider avenues to the search, for whatever good either skill or power could extract out of the world, than Solomon. No one could judge of the sweets which can be drawn from this grand alembic, with higher natural abilities, or with deeper experimental wisdom. He did not descant on the vanity of the world so eloquently till he had considered it accurately, and examined it practically. He was not contented, like a learned theorist, to collect his notions from philosophy, or history, or hearsay; he well knew what he said, "and whereof he affirmed." All upon which he so pathetically preached, he had seen with his eyes, heard with his ears, and, in his widely-roving search, had experienced in

his own disappointed mind, and felt in his own aching heart. He goes on to prove, by an induction of particulars, the grand truth propounded in his thesis, the *vanity of the world.* He shows, in a regular series of experiments, how he had ransacked its treasures, exhausted its enjoyments, and, even to satiety, revelled in its honours, riches, and delights. He had been an intellectual as well as sensual voluptuary, and had emptied the resources of knowledge as well as of pleasure. — Then reverting in the close of his discourse to the point from which he had set out, he again pronounces, that all is vanity.

"The conclusion of the whole matter" which he draws from this melancholy argument, as finely exhibited as pensively conceived, is a solemn injunction to others to remember, what it is to be feared the Preacher himself had sometimes forgotten, that the whole duty of man is to fear God, and keep his commandments; winding up his fine peroration with a motive in which every child of Adam is equally, is awfully concerned, "*because* God shall bring every work into judgment."

May not every real Christian, while his heart is touched with the affecting truth of the text, be admonished by this solemn valedictory declaration? May he not learn the lesson inculcated at less expense than it was acquired by this great practical master of the science of

wisdom? If another sovereign was told there was no royal way to geometry, the King of Israel has opened a royal way to a more divine philosophy. By the benefit to be derived from contemplating this illustrious instance of "how little are the great," the Christian may set out where Solomon ended. He may be convinced of the vanity of the world at a price far cheaper than Solomon paid for it, by a way far safer than his own experience. He may convert the experiment made by the royal Preacher to his own personal account. He may find in the doctrines of the Gospel a confirmation of its truth, in its precepts a counteraction to its perils, in its promises a consolation for its disappointments.

In this world, such as Solomon has vividly painted it, the Christian is to live — is to live, through divine assistance, untainted by its maxims, uncontaminated by its practices. Man being obviously designed by his Creator for social life, and society being evidently his proper place and condition, it seems to be his duty, not so much to consider what degree of possible perfection he might have attained in that state of seclusion to which he was never destined, as how he may usefully fill his allotted sphere in the world for which he was made; how he may conscientiously discharge the duties to which he is plainly called by providential ordination. To think how he may acquit himself well in his

actual state and condition, is clearly more profitable, than to waste his time and spirits in devising the best speculative scheme of life, to the adoption of which there is little probability of his ever being appointed.

We were not sent into this world with orders to make ourselves miserable, but with abilities, and directions, and helps, to search out the best possibilities of happiness which remain to beings, fallen from that state of moral and mental rectitude in which man was created; to make the best of the ruins of that perfect world whose beauty he had marred, and whose capacity of conferring felicity he had fatally impaired. Human life, therefore, abounding as it does in blessings and mercies, is not the blissful vision which youthful fancy images, or poetry feigns, or romance exhibits. It is in a considerable measure compounded of painful and of dull realities, and not a splendid tissue of grand events or brilliant exploits; it is to some an almost unvaried state of penury, to many a series of cares and troubles, to all, a state of probation. But the primeval punishment, the sentence of labour, like the other inflictions of Him who in judgment remembers mercy, is transformed into a blessing. And, whether we consider the manual industry of the poor, or the intellectual exertions of the superior classes, we shall find that diligent occupation, if not criminally perverted from its end, is at once the instrument of

virtue and the secret of happiness. Man cannot be safely trusted with a life of leisure.

As the character about to be briefly considered is presumed to be a real Christian, it would be superfluous, for two reasons, to insist that his vocation in the world must be lawful. It is not to be supposed that a religious man will ever engage in an employment that is illicit; and it is almost equally beyond supposition, that persons who are actually so engaged, will cast their eyes on a book whose tendency is serious.

But the most unexceptionable profession is not exempt from dangers. It requires strict watchfulness, not only to conduct the most useful undertaking in a right spirit, and with a constant eye to Him, to whom every intelligent being is accountable; it requires not only constant vigilance against the allurements of avarice, and the baits of ambition, but it requires caution against the unsuspected mischiefs of embarking so widely, or plunging so deeply in any temporal concern, as almost necessarily to deteriorate the character. He embarks too widely, and plunges too deeply, however honourable be the undertaking, if it absorb the whole man — if it so crowd his mind with interfering schemes and complicated projects, as to leave no time and no thought, and gradually no inclination, for that reference which should be the ultimate end of all human designs.

It can never be too often repeated, however

writers tire with saying, and readers with hearing it, that it is scarcely more necessary to address serious suggestions to men sunk in gross pursuits, than to that large, and important, and valuable class, whose danger lies in the very credit and dignity, and usefulness of their engagements. A thousand dissertations have been written, and yet the theme is not exhausted, on that hackneyed but neglected truth, that *we are undone by lawful things*, by excess in things right in themselves, and which only become wrong by being inordinately pursued — pursued to the neglect of things more essential; when what is even laudable is exclusively sought, to the forgetfulness of what is indispensable. Things may not only be comparatively, but positively, good, and yet not be "things which accompany salvation." They may not only be intended to be instrumental, but actually be so, both in advancing the prosperity, and in restraining the disorders of this world, and so far be highly valuable, and yet the act may be substituted for that principle which should be its inspiring motive. The fault, however, is not in the thing, but in the mind, when useful actions are not done with a reference to the highest end. Of this reference a Christian will aim never to lose sight. He will, before he engage in the concerns of the day, prepare his mind by fervent devotion; not only imploring direction in the common course of action, and the expected oc-

currences of the day, but strength to meet those unknown occasions and unsuspected events, which, in human life, and especially in a life of business, so frequently occur. Without this panoply, he will not venture to engage with the world; but the armour which he put on in solitude, he will not lay aside in the field of battle: it was for that warfare he had buckled it on.

As the lawyer has his compendium of cases and precedents, the legislator his statutes, the soldier his book of tactics, and every other professor his *vade mecum* to consult in difficulties, the Christian, to whichever of the professions he may belong, will take his morning lecture from a more infallible directory, comprehending not only cases and precedents, but abounding also with those seminal principles which contain the essence of all actual duty, from which all practical excellence is deducible. This spirit of laws differs from all other legal institutes, some of which, from that imperfection inseparable from the best human things, have been found unintelligible, some impracticable, and some have become obsolete. The divine law is subject to no such disadvantages. It is perfect in its nature, intelligible in its construction, and eternal in its obligation.

This sacred institute he will consult, not occasionally, but daily. Unreminded of general duty, unfurnished with some leading hint for the particular demand, he will not venture to

rush into the bustle, trial, and temptation of the day. Of this aid he will possess himself with more ease, and less loss of time, as he will not have to ransack a multiplicity of folios for a detached case, or an individual intricacy; for, though he may not find in the Bible specific instances, yet he will discover in every page some governing truth, some rule of universal application, the spirit of which may be brought to bear on almost every circumstance; some principle suited to every purpose, and competent to the solution of every moral difficulty. Scripture does not, indeed, pretend to include technical or professional peculiarities, but it exhibits the temper and the conduct which may be made applicable to the special concerns of every man, whatever be his occupation. He will find in it the right direction to the right pursuit, the strait road to the proper end; the duty of a pure intention; and the prohibition of false measures to attain even a laudable object. No hurry or engagement will ever make him lose sight of that sacred aphorism so pointedly addressed to men of business, "He that maketh haste to be rich, shall hardly be innocent." The cautionary texts he admired in his closet, he will not treasure up as classical mottoes to amuse his fancy or embellish his discourse, but will adopt as rules of conduct, and bring them into every worldly transaction, whether commercial, forensic, medical, military, or whatever else be his pro-

fessed object. He will not adjust his scale of duty by the false standard of the world, nor by any measure of his own devising; he has but one standard of judging, but one measure of conduct — the infallible word of God. This rule he will take as he finds it, he will use as he is commanded; he will not bend it to his own convenience, he will not accommodate it to his own views, his own passions, his own emolument, his own reputation.

Here it may be asked, Why is not Scripture more explicit in direction, more minute in detail? We find our self-love perpetually furnishing subterfuges for evading duties and multiplying exceptions to rules. God, who knows all hearts, and foresaw their captiousness, might, it may be said, have guarded against it by more enlarged instructions. The Holy Spirit, however, did not see fit to descend to such minutiæ, but, having given the principle, left man to the exercise of his reason, in the application of the general law to his particular case; for if he is left to the use of his judgment, it is not that he may pervert truth, but apply it. His understanding and rectitude are perpetually called into joint exercise, for that which is immediately the duty of one man, another may not be called to perform.

Not to distress the mind, therefore, with unnecessary scruples, nor to perplex it by a multiplicity of circumstances, some things are left

indefinite. An incumbered body of institutes would have been too vast and complicated for general use; that time would be taken up in selecting them, which is better employed in acting upon them. Even were every particular of every duty, in all its bearings, circumstantially ramified, it would not so much direct the conduct, as furnish new pretences for neglecting it. Then, as now, it would be seen rather that the will is perverse, than the understanding unsatisfied. More amplification would not have lessened objections. Those who complain now that the rule is not explicit, would complain then that it was tedious. A fuller exposition would neither have cleared doubts nor prevented disputes. It would then have been charged with redundancy, as it is now with defectiveness.

If the world carries contamination to the heart, it carries also to the right-minded a preservative; as the viper's blood is said to be an antidote for its bite. The living world is to such persons an improving exemplification of the moral lessons of history. If we apply to our own improvement the recorded excellencies or errors of which we read; if we are struck with the successes or defeats of ambition; the pursuits or disappointments of vanity; the sordid accumulations of avarice, or the wasting ravages of prodigality; if we are moved with instances of vice and virtue in men of whom we know nothing but what the historian is pleased to tell us,

and of whom he perhaps knew not much more; if we read with interest of the violence of parties, of which both the leaders and the followers have been long laid in the dust; if we are affected, as every intelligent mind cannot but be affected, with these pictures of things, how much benefit may a well-directed mind derive from seeing them realised; from seeing the old scenes acted over again by living performers; from living himself among the *dramatis personæ* as one of the actors; from taking a personal interest in a repetition of things which he condemned or applauded when only coldly presented to his understanding, and at which his principles revolted or rejoiced, even in the dead letter of narrative. He now sees the same sentiments embodied, the same passions brought into action, similar opinions operating upon actual conduct.

If he is deeply touched when history presents to his view the errors of high and heroic minds, when it exhibits the aberrations of superior genius, how much more lively will be his regret, when he sees, among his own acquaintance, the ardour of a noble and ingenuous mind exclusively consumed on objects, which might indeed be accounted great if this world were all, but which never gives any practical intimation that there is another. But how much more pungent will be his sorrow, when he observes lofty and sagacious spirits neglecting to make the

most even of this brief state of being; — when he sees men who might have made the world a better thing than they found it, had they employed their superior powers of intellect in studying how they might please God, by promoting the best interests of his creatures: when he sees such understandings clouded by intemperance, such minds absorbed in studying the qualities of a race-horse, or calculating the chances of a gaming-table!

In another, and a more estimable class of characters, he is struck with mingled admiration and concern, in observing what good and resembling imitations of religion are made by honour, sense, and spirit; how respectably moral honesty, kindness, and generosity may, to superficial observers, personate Christianity, may even execute the act of piety with an utter destitution of the principle. He sees in certain minds some masterly strokes of natural beauty, which at once dignify and embellish them, so as, on some occasions, to tempt him to forget that they are not religious. But these brilliant qualities are not infused into the entire character; the excellence is limited to a few shining points, and the hollows are proportioned to the heights. Rich in some splendid virtues, there is no uniformity in the principle; there is perhaps some allowed sin in the practice: while in the character of the real Christian, though there may be much infirmity, there is a desire of consistency — there

is no deliberate transgression — there is even no unrepented error.

These living lessons the pious observer will turn to account. The impression thus made on his heart, from actual observation, will sink deeper, and be more durable than the instruction to be obtained by a mere intellectual view of mankind, from information collected from writers, who are obliged to pick up facts, not from having witnessed them, but as they find them in preceding writers; men who know little of the causes of which they describe the effects, or the motives of the actions they record. History paints men, acute observation anatomises them.

If he regret that his necessary duties in the world trench on the time he would gladly devote to religious pursuits, let him take comfort that these regrets, if sincere, are an earnest of his safety. The very corruptions to which he is witness, will experimentally convince him of the truth of a doctrine, which is no where more completely learned than in the bustle of life. The perception of this evil in others, makes him watch against similar tendencies within; tendencies which only the grace daily invoked by him prevents from breaking out into action. This deep conviction of man's corruption, instead of impairing his benevolence, will improve it. It will teach him not to expect too much from so imperfect a being, as well as to bear with the errors which his belief of the doctrine

had led him to expect. This, together with his intercourse with the world, will cure him of that mistake so common to persons who have no lived in it, that of expecting no faults in those which a fond imagination, on a first acquaintance, had led them to believe perfect, and who, on the inevitable discovery, become too strongly disgusted with errors and imperfections, on which they ought to have reckoned. He will never use his full conviction of the truth of which we have been speaking, to the purposes of unworthy distrust, or base suspicion. On the contrary, though he will exercise his discernment in the knowledge of men, and his discretion as to the confidence to be placed in them, he will not be ever on the look-out to detect, much less to expose, their errors. Though he "loves not the world," in the Scripture sense of the term, he loves the individuals of whom it is composed with the affection of sympathy. He will put a large and liberal construction on their actions; but he will not stretch that latitude to the vindication of any thing that is corrupt in principle, or criminal in conduct. Nor will he be always on the defensive in his intercourse with them: he will not act with the narrow selfishness of the sordid trader, who is jealous of every man with whom he has business to transact, on no higher ground than lest he should lose money by him; while he tolerates in his

character every vice which will not interfere with his pecuniary transactions.

It is his aim to reconcile that charity which believeth all things, with that discrimination of character which shows us, not only so many who are bad, but so much imperfection, we may say, so much evil, in the comparatively good. To love and serve those in whom we at the same time perceive no little moral defect, is turning our spiritual discernment to a practical account. This principle, while it serves to preserve us from an undue admiration of others, will teach us to suspect these, or other defects, in ourselves.

The Christian in the world, anxious to improve his scanty leisure, will rescue from mere diversion those hours which cannot prudently be subtracted from business. To a man thus circumstanced, the Sunday is felt to be indeed a blessing; to him it is emphatically "a delight." Instead of appropriating it as a day of premeditated conviviality, he converts it into a stated season of enjoyment of another kind. He hardly needs the injunction to "remember" to keep it holy, though he is not unmindful, that, of the ten commandments, it is the only one prefaced with that admonition. He considers the observance as almost more his privilege than his duty. The expectation of its return cheers him under the perplexities of the week. He anticipates it as a rest here, and as a foretaste of

eternal rest. He enlarges his pious exercises with the more satisfaction, as he is clearly assured that he is not on this day in danger of trenching on his professional duties; and, from this reflection, his heart more warmly expands in gratitude to Him whose day it more immediately is. He feels that, if it were barely a season ordained by some public act, a royal proclamation, enjoining it as a necessary interval between the labours which close one week and those which begin another, a contrivance of ease, a measure of political prudence or personal tenderness, to prevent the bodily machine and the overlaboured mind from wearing out, he would be grateful for its institution; but to him the day comes fraught with benefits and blessings of a still higher kind. It is an appointment of God; *that* entitles it to his reverence; it is an institution of spiritual mercy; it is the stated season for recruiting his mental vigour; for inspecting his accounts with his Maker; for taking a more exact survey of the state of his heart; for examining into his faults; for enumerating his mercies; for laying in, by prayer, fresh stores of faith and holiness; for repairing what both may have lost in the turmoil of the week. His heated passions have leisure to cool; his hurried mind to regain its tranquil tone; his whole internal state to be regulated; his mistakes to be reviewed; his temper to be new set; his piety to be braced up to the pitch from which

it may have been sunk in the atmosphere he had been breathing. The pious man of business relishes his family society and fire-side enjoyments with a keenness not always felt by others. If "the harp, and the tabret, and the viol," are not always heard in his feasts, he does what those who listen to them do not always remember to do, for "he considers the works of the Lord, and regards the operations of his hands." It is not enough for the devoted Christian that his life is dedicated to him who gave it; his spirit is, as it were, exhaled in his service. *

* It is to be regretted, that the members of a learned and honourable profession, and which has produced so many exemplary characters, should appoint their consultations on Sundays. It is urged in excuse, that they cannot clash with any public courts or sittings on that day. The leading men, by this custom, force some of those whose practice is less established into a breach of their duty, against which their consciences perhaps revolt. Might not one of these two sacrifices obviate the necessity which is pleaded in its vindication? Might they not either reject such a superfluity of business as induces it — or, if that be too much to expect, might they not subtract the time from their social and convivial hours?

## CHAP. XXIV.

### DIFFICULTIES AND ADVANTAGES OF THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD.

THERE are two things of which a wise man will be scrupulously careful, his conscience and his credit. Happily they are almost inseparable concomitants; they are commonly kept or lost together; the same things which wound the one, usually giving a blow to the other: yet, it must be confessed, that conscience and a mere worldly credit are not, in all instances, allowed to subsist together. God and our hearts — we speak of hearts which are looked into and examined — always condemn us for the same things, things, perhaps, for which we do not suffer in the opinion of the world: the world, in return, not seldom condemns us for actions, for which we have the approbation of God and our consciences. Is it right to put the verdict of such opposite judges on an equality, nay, to abide by that which will be less than nothing when *his* sentence, whose favour is eternal life, shall be finally pronounced?

Between a wounded conscience and a wounded credit, there is the same difference as between

a crime and a calamity. Of two inevitable evils, religion instructs us to submit to that which is inferior and involuntary. As much as reputation exceeds every worldly good, so much, and far more, is conscience to be consulted before credit — if credit that can be called, which is derived from the acclamations of a mob, whether composed of "the great vulgar or the small."

Yet are we not perpetually seeing, that, to secure this worthless fame, peace and conscience are sacrificed? For to what but a miserably false estimate of the relative value of these two blessings; what but the preference of character to duty — in support, too, of a rotten part of it — is it, that the wretched system of duelling not only maintains its ground, but is increasing with a frightful rapidity? If we have, perhaps, never heard of a truly religious man engaged in a duel *, it is not that, with all his caution, he is not liable to provocations and insults, as well as other men; nor that he has no quick sense of injuries, no spirit to repel attacks, and no courage to defend himself. He who bears

* Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the first of our deistical writers, and the last hero of our ancient chivalry, with that fantastic combination of devotion and gallantry which characterised the profession of knighthood, tells us, in the Memoirs of his own Life, that he strictly maintained the religious observance of the Sabbath, except when called out to fight a duel for a point of honour, which he seemed to have thought a paramount duty.

insults is made of like passions with him who revenges them; his pride longs to break out if it dared; for even a good man, as the Prelate quoted in the last chapter observes, "has more to do with this one viper, than with all his other corruptions."

But, among other causes, his safety lies in this, that he has always endeavoured to keep clear of those initiatory offences which lead to this catastrophe; it is because he has been habitually governed by principles of a directly contrary tendency, and has not the lesson of forbearance to learn, when he is called upon to practise it: because he has not indulged himself in those habits, and, as little as may be, in those societies which lay a man open to the consequences of which ungoverned appetites are the source; because he has always considered pride and passion as the possible seeds of murder; an impure glance as the first approach to that crime which is the ordinary source of duelling — the combined violation of these two commandments being as closely connected in practice as is their position in the Decalogue. It is observable, that while the shifts and stratagems to which a man is commonly driven by illicit connections so often lead to duelling, yet that the charge of that crime itself, or of any other equally atrocious, far more rarely provokes a challenge, than the charge of

the lie, to which the crime has compelled him to resort. Can there be a more striking instance of the false estimate of character and virtue, than that the offence is not made to consist in the falsehood itself, but in the accusation of it?

The man of mere worldly principles keeps himself in the broad way, which, should events occur, and temptations arise to irritate him, may at any time lead to such a termination. His habits of life, his choice of associates, his systematic resolution to revenge every insult, makes his common path a path of danger. His pride is always ready primed; he carries the inflammable matter in his habit, and the first spark may cause an explosion; while the man of principle, in addition to all the other guards before enumerated, wants, indeed, but this single consideration to deter him from the spirit of duelling: that it is the act, of all others, which stands in the most determined opposition to the law of God, and the spirit of the Gospel; that it is a studied, deliberate, premeditated subversion of one of the most imperious duties of Christianity, by making it infamous to forgive injuries.

And even if a man be more correct in his habits, still if the maxims of the world, and not those of Christianity, govern him, he loses sight of the great principles which would restrain excesses in temper, as well as in conduct. He

first loses sight of these, perhaps by negligence in private devotion, possibly by a careless attendance on public worship. Thus freeing himself from these observances, he loses sight of the obligations of religion; and losing this strongest "muzzle of restraint," it is the less wonder that a small provocation tempts him to offer bloody sacrifices to that fantastic but cruel idol, worldly honour. It is the less wonder that a neglected, even where there is not a perverted, principle, should end in the murder of his friend, and the destruction of his own soul; for of a merely convivial friendship, a duel is no very uncommon termination.

But to return. — In the ordinary pursuits of life, the good man differs but little from others, in the keenness with which he embarks in enterprise, or in the diligence with which he prosecutes it; but he carries it on in another spirit. He is not less solicitous in the pursuit, but there is less perturbation in his solicitude; he makes no undue sacrifices to attain his object. He seeks the Divine blessing, not that he may slacken his own exertions, but that he may be directed in them, supported under them. Sanguine, perhaps, by nature, he yet takes into the account the probabilities of disappointment: this, when it occurs, he bears as one, who, though careful of the motive and mode of his conduct, had put the affair into the hands of the Master of events.

His failure does not discourage him from fresh exertions, when occasions equally right present themselves. He is grateful for success, but not intoxicated by it. Under defeat he is resigned, but not desponding. He measures the intrinsic value of an object by asking his own mind, though he thinks so highly of its importance now, what he shall probably think of it when his ardour is cooled, and especially, what he shall think of it when all things shall be brought into judgment. This question settled, either moderates or augments the interest he takes in it.

Knowing that whatever he proposes in the way of public good is liable to be suspected of imprudence or mistaken zeal, he turns this exposure to suspicion to his own advantage. It leads him to examine his project more accurately; to spy out its weak side, if it have any; and to anticipate, by the operation of a well-exercised judgment, the objections which his opponents are likely to make. Foreseeing the points which may create opposition, he guards against it, either by altering his plan, if defective, or preparing to defend it, if sound. One of his great difficulties, and yet it is his only security, will be his custom of referring all matters in debate "to the law and to the testimony." This will lead him constantly to oppose principle to expediency. Of this incommo-

dious integrity, he must abide the censure and the consequences. He will have no share in the crooked arts and intrigues by which some men rise so fast, and become so popular. He will detest craft almost as much as fraud, and the pitiful shifts of a narrow policy as much as he will love the light and open path of truth and honesty. — He does not slacken in his undeviating strictness, though he is aware, that this is the quality which peculiarly exposes him to misrepresentation. Exertion, struggle, conflict, these are the trials for which he prepares himself. Thankful for tranquillity when it can be honestly obtained, enjoying repose when he has fairly earned it; he yet knows that this is not the world in which they are to be looked for with any certainty, or enjoyed with any continuance; and this conviction of its instability and fluctuation is one of the many arguments with which he seeks to arm himself against the fear of death.

The unequal distribution of the good things of this life, the inferior success of men of more virtue, higher talent, and a better outset, than others of his acquaintance, whose beginning was low, and whose deserts equivocal, remind him that prosperity is no sure test of merit, and that the favour of heaven is not to be estimated by success. God, he recollects, has made no special promise of prosperity to his children. When given, it is to be esteemed no certain mark of

his approbation; when withdrawn, it is often in mercy; when withheld, it is because God has higher designs for his less prosperous servants. As to himself, the events of every day teach him, that he had expected more from human life than it had to bestow, and that his disappointments arise not less from his own sanguine temper, than from the deceits of that world which it had over-rated.

The world, especially we may here remark, the commercial world, particularly in these awful times, is calculated to teach forbearance, far more than sequestered life, because men often suffer so severely in their fortune and credit by the errors or misfortunes of others. If the good man suffer by his own fault, he will find a fresh motive for humility; if by the fault of another, for patience; if more directly from the hand of God, for submission. Whatever be the fluctuations of his fortune, his faith will gain stability, for he will discern an invisible hand directing all events for his ultimate good. If he is placed in a state of peculiar agitation, God intends to lead him by it to seek his rest where only it can be found. If in a state of singular difficulty, it is to show him his own weakness, and his immediate dependence on Him who gives strength to the weak. This principle admitted, will furnish new motives to watchfulness and prayer, without any diminution of activity or spirit.

His observations on the gradual process, by

which the love of money monopolises the hearts of others, teach him to guard his own against its encroachments. He sees that the first designs of men are commonly moderate. Few take in at one view all the length they go afterwards. They look not beyond a certain eminence. On this they fix as the summit of their desires. But what appeared high at a distance, sinks when approached; is nothing when attained; — "Alps rise on Alps;" — a further distance presents a further height; this, they are sure, will bound their desires: this attained, they are resolved to retire and dedicate their lives and their riches to the end for which, they persuade themselves, they have been toiling. But with the acquisition, the desire increases; wants grow out of riches. The moderate man is become insatiable. The principle thrives with the attainment of its object. Though hope is exchanged for possession, yet the restless principle continues to work, and will work on, unless a higher principle, by which he is every day less likely and less desirous to be governed, should arise to check it.

Society being composed of intelligent human beings, the wise man knows that something may be generally learned from it relative to the human character; that some benefit may be reaped, even if little positive good appear in it; and more does sometimes appear than we are willing to put to profit. Lessons may be ex-

tracted from the very faults of men; from the vehemence of their passions, the mistakes of their judgment, the blindness of their prejudice.

The Holy Scriptures frequently make the anxious diligence of men, in the pursuit of worldly advantages, a lesson which a better man would do well to improve upon in his higher pursuits. He may find in *their* industry a standard, though not a model: the wisdom he learns from this generation, he will convert to the purposes of the children of light. The world's wise man is ever on the watch for advancing his projects. If he contract an acquaintance of importance, his first thought is, how he may make the most of him; the Christian is equally careful to turn the acquisition of a pious friend to his own account, but with a higher view.

The mind, on the watch for improvement, will improve by the very errors of others. Virtue, our Divine Master has taught us, may take some profitable lessons from vice. The activity of the fraudful steward may stimulate the negligent Christian. From the perseverance of the malignant in their patient prosecution of revenge, he may learn fortitude under discouragements, and resolution under difficulties. Injuries may teach him the value of justice; may set him upon investigating its principle, and guarding against its violation. The wiliness of the designing may keep his understanding on the alert, and confirm the prudence it has excited.

Temptations from without strengthen his powers of resistance: his own faults show him his own weakness, as it is foreign aggression which forms heroes, and domestic opposition which makes statesmen.

His thirst for human applause will be abated, when he observes in those around him the unexpected attainment of popularity so soon followed by its unmerited loss. When he beholds the rapid transfer of power, it will, more than whole tomes of philosophy, show him that "favour is deceitful." He will moderate his desires of great riches, when he sees by what sacrifices they are sometimes obtained, and to what temptations the possession leads. He will be less likely to repine that others are reaching the summit of ambition, whether they achieve it by talents which he does not possess, or attain it by steps which he would not choose to climb, or maintain it by concessions which he would not care to make. The pangs of party with which he sees some of his friends convulsed, and the turbulent anxiety with which they watch the prognostics of its rise and fall, keep him sober without making him indifferent. He preserves his temper with his attachments, and his integrity with his preferences, because he is habitually watching how he may serve the state, and not how, by increasing her perplexities, he may advance himself.

The use he thus makes of the world will not carry him to the length of entangling himself in

its snares. Though he maintains a necessary intercourse with men of opposite character, he will not push that intercourse further than occasion requires. He will transact business with them with frankness and civility, but he will not follow them to any objectionable lengths. He is aware, that though a wise man will never choose an infected atmosphere, yet "He who fixes our lot in life" will protect him in it in the way of duty, and will furnish an antidote to the contagion. A courageous piety doubles its caution when exposed to an impure air, but a prudent piety will never voluntarily plunge into it. It will never forget, that, if the corruptions of the world are so dangerous, they are rendered so by those of our own hearts, since we carry about us a constitution disposed to infection. The true Christian will make a conscience of letting it appear, that he differs in very important points from many of those with whom business or society brings him into contact; lest, by the facility and kindness of his general behaviour, they should be led into an error as to his principles. For worldly men, having been accustomed to connect narrowness, reserve, and gloom, with serious piety, they might infer from his pleasant deportment and frank address, that his principles were as lax as his manners are disengaged.

He will, therefore, be careful, not unnecessarily to alienate them by any thing forbidding

in his exterior; he will cheerfully fall in with any plan of theirs consistent with his own principles; and more especially, should it be any plan of benevolence and general utility, and one more promising than his own, he will never feel backward to promote it, through the mean fear of transferring the popularity of the measure to another. Yet he acts, nevertheless, as knowing there is no humility in a man's taking a false measure of his own understanding, and therefore does not give up his independence of mind, when the superiority of the scheme of the other does not carry conviction to his judgment. He will first clear his motive, and next his prudence in the measure, and then be as prompt in action as those who rush into it without deliberation or principle.

He keeps his ultimate end in view, even in the most ordinary concerns, and on occasions which to others may not seem likely to promote it. He knows that good breeding will give currency to good sense; that good sense adds credit to virtue, and even helps to strip religion of its tendency to displease. By his exactness in performing the common duties of life more accurately than other men, he may lead them to look from the action up to the principle which produced it; and when they see the advantages arising from such carefulness of conduct, they may be induced to examine into the reasons; and from inquiring to adopting is not always a

remote step. He may thus lead them into an insensible imitation, without the vain idea of presenting himself as a model; for he wishes them to admire, not him, but the source from which he draws both what he believes and what he is.

While he suggests hints for their benefit, he is willing they should think the suggestion their own; that they owe it to reflection, and not to instruction. Like the great Athenian philosopher, he does not so much aim to teach wisdom to others, as to put them in the way of finding it out for themselves. His piety does not lessen his urbanity, even towards those who are obviously deficient in some points, which he deems of high importance. If they are useful members of the great body of society, he is the first to commend their activity, to acknowledge their amiable qualities, to do justice to their speeches or writings, while they are disconnected with dangerous or doubtful objects. On general subjects he never labours to discredit their opinions, unless they obviously stand in the way of something of more worth. But all these cheerfully allowed merits will never make him lose sight of any grand deficiency in the principle, of any thing erroneous in the tendency.

Of his own religion he neither makes a parade nor a secret; he is of opinion, that to avow his sentiments prevents mistakes, saves trouble, obviates conjectures, and maintains independence.

He acknowledges them with modesty, and defends them with firmness. On other occasions, instead of shutting himself up in a close and sullen reserve, because others do not agree with him in the great cause which lies nearest his heart, he is glad that the general diffusion of knowledge has so multiplied the points at which well-educated men can have access to the minds of each other; points at which improvements in taste and science may be reciprocally communicated, the tone of conversation raised, and society rendered considerably useful, and sometimes in a high degree profitable.

But notwithstanding the clearness of his own spirit, and the intimations of an enlightened conscience, he yet carries about with him such a modest sense of his own liableness to what is wrong, as keeps up in his mind the idea that the error may possibly be on his side. This feeling, though it never makes him adopt, through weakness, the opinion of another, makes him always humble in the defence of his own. He opposes what is obviously bad with an earnest but sober zeal, a fervid but unboisterous warmth, a vigorous but calm perseverance.

He will not hunt for popularity; he knows that this is one of the common dangers from which even good men are not exempt; for, after all, the mere good men of the world do not monopolise all credit. Highly principled and pious men form a powerful and increasing

minority, which, by concord, firmness, and prudence, often makes no inconsiderable figure. When viewed collectively,

"Bright as a sun the sacred city shines."

Each individual, however, according as he contributes, or may fancy he contributes, to the brightness, is in danger of priding himself on the general effect. And many a weak or designing man, placing himself under the broad shelter of what he delights to call *the religious world*, limits his zeal to the credit of being accounted a member, instead of extending it to the arduous duties it imposes; and, while he superciliously decries many a worthy person, who, without the pretension, performs the functions, he is as full of the world as the world is of itself. Popularity thus sought after and obtained, whether within or without the pale even of a religious community, is of a dangerous tendency, and a truly Christian mind will alike tremble to bestow or receive the praise.

But if the Christian character we have been faintly attempting to sketch possess a commanding station, either in fortune, rank, or talent, especially if he combine them; his character, without any assumption of his own, without any affectation of superiority, will, by its own weight, its own attraction, above all, by its consistency, be a sort of rallying point, round which the well disposed, the timid, and the young, will resort

to obtain a sanction, and to fortify their principles. For, if it is not the *prevailing* principle, there is yet much more piety in the world than the pious themselves are willing to allow. If so strange a phrase may be allowed, we should almost suspect that, in a certain class, there is more good hypocrisy than bad; more who conceal their piety, than who make a display of it. Many, who are secretly and sincerely religious, want courage to avow their sentiments, want resolution to act up to them, either because the popular tide runs another way, or because they dread the imputation of singularity, and are afraid of raising a portentous cry against themselves.

The good man respects the world's opinion, without making it the leading motive of his conduct. He never provokes hostility by any arrogant intimation that he does not care what people think of him; a conduct not more offensive to others, than indicative of a self-sufficient spirit. He is careful to avoid a particular *cut*. He will not be pointed at for any trifling peculiarity. He fences in, not only his ordinary, but his best actions, with prudence, well knowing how much the manner may expose the matter to misrepresentation. He does this not merely for his own credit, but because, to a certain degree, with his reputation are involved the good of others, and the honour of religion. He endeavours, as far as he can honestly do it,

to remove prejudices, which an imprudent piety rather glories in augmenting, and thus widens the separation between the two classes of characters; whereas, that which is intrinsically good should be always outwardly amiable. He, therefore, will not make his departure from the order which general usage has established observable in any of the harmless and accredited modes of life. He will not voluntarily augment that wonder which his departure from the less innocent fashions of the world must excite. The wonder will be sufficiently great, why, in stronger cases, he should subject himself to a discipline different from theirs, and they will ask, where is the use of aiming to be better than those whom they call good?

By the cheerful alacrity with which he performs and receives all acts of kindness, he gives the best answer to Lord Shaftesbury's character of Christianity, "that it is so taken up with the care of our future happiness, as to throw away all the present;" a sneer which is about as true as the other sarcasms of this eloquent but superficial reasoner; for if religion does call for some sacrifices of pleasure and of profit, yet every part of its practice increases our real happiness, by the augmentation of our own virtue, as much as it advances that of others; by its promotion of kindness, beneficence, good will, and good order.

He not only refuses his time and his example

to scenes of luxury and dissipation; his superfluous wealth has also a higher destination; he must not, however, be expected to aim at a primitive frugality, many of the superfluities of life having, in some measure, become classed among its necessaries. The spirit of a Christian can never be a penurious spirit. His habits of living will be proportioned to his rank and fortune; taking, however, the average expenditure of many of the more discreet. He will never, even on religious grounds, by the example of parsimony, furnish the sordid with a pretence for accumulation.

He has another powerful motive for avoiding extravagance. He knows that a well-regulated economy is the only infallible source of independence. He will not, therefore, lavish in idle splendour a fortune, that he may be driven to recruit by sacrifices, which, by robbing him of his freedom, will diminish his virtue. He thinks that what Tacitus has said of a public exchequer is not less true of a private purse, that what is exhausted by profligacy, must be repaired by rapacity. This incommodious rectitude will expose him to the dislike of less correct men; for, after all that has been urged against the adoption of religious doctrines, it is not so much the strictness of opinion, as of practice, which renders a man obnoxious. He may be of any religion he pleases, provided he will live like those who have none. If he be convivial and

accommodating, they will not care if he worship Brama and Veeshnoo; though they would not perhaps forgive his professing the Hindu faith, if it involved the necessity of their dining with him upon rice; nor would he be pardoned for embracing the doctrines of the Arabian Prophet, while the Koran continues to prohibit the use of wine.

Though pleasure is not the leading object of his pursuit, he yet finds more than those, who spend their lives in pursuit of nothing else. He finds the range of innocent and elegant enjoyment sufficiently ample and attractive, without being driven for a resource to the disqualifying grossness of sensuality, or the relaxing allurements of dissipation. The fine arts, in all their lovely and engaging forms of beauty, the ever-new delights of literature, whether wooed in its lighter graces, or sought in its more substantial attractions, the exchange

From grave to gay, from lively to severe,

shed sweet, and varied, and exhaustless charms on his leisure hours, and send him back with renewed freshness, added vigour, and increased animation, to his necessary employments.

Though the strictly pious man is more exposed to temptation in the world than in retirement, yet he finds in it reasons which stimulate him to more circumspection. He is aware that he lies more open to observation, and of course

to censure. As he is more observed by others, he more carefully observes himself. He watches his own faults with the same vigilance with which worldly men watch the faults of others, and for the same reason, that he may turn them to his own profit: the more he is surrounded with temptations, the more he is driven to feel his want of Divine protection. If his talents or exertions are flattered, he flies more earnestly to *his* direction, "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift." We appeal to the pious reader, whether he does not frequently feel more circumspect and less confident in society from which he fears deterioration, than in that on which he depends for improvement; — whether he does not feel a sort of perilous security in company, in which an expansion of heart lessens his self-distrust; and whether he has never, by leaning on the friend, looked less to Him "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy."

If in debate he is sometimes accused of showing too much warmth in defence of religion, while its opponent, by his superior calmness, establishes his own character for moderation and good temper, it is because it costs the latter little to manifest a coolness which is the natural effect of indifference. The man who plays for nothing needs not be moved, whatever turn the game may take; while he, whose dearest interests are at stake, will not easily hide the emo-

tion which he cannot but feel. When King Solomon decreed, as a test of affection, that the living child should be cut in pieces, the pretended mother calmly submitted to the decision. She had nothing to lose. Her hope was dead. She would enjoy seeing her competitor reduced to her own desolate state; while the real mother, who had a vital interest in the object to be sacrificed, was tortured at the proposal. The genuineness of the feeling betrayed the reality of the relation.

The Christian, circumstanced as we have described him, hardly dares wish for an uninterrupted, smooth, and prosperous course; for, though he endeavours to sit loose to the world, every severe disappointment or privation makes him feel that he still clings too fondly to it; every trial and every loss, therefore, make him relax something of the firmness of his grasp.

Is your Christian, then, perfect, you will perhaps ask? Ask himself. With deep and sincere self-abasement he will answer in the negative. He will not only confess more failings than even his accusers ascribe to him, but he will own what they do not always charge him with — sins. He will acknowledge that there is no natural difference between himself and his censurer, but that, through Divine grace, the one prays and struggles against those corruptions, the very existence of which the other does not suspect.

The peace of the confirmed Christian lies not at the mercy of events. As on the agitated ocean, storms and tempests never divert the faithful needle from its invariable object, so the distractions of the world shake not *his* confidence in Him who governs it. He remembers that these winds and waves are still bearing him onward to his haven, while, on the stormy passage, they enable him to exhibit a trying but a constant evidence that God may be honoured in all, even in the most unpromising, situations. Even in the worst condition, a real Christian is sure of the presence of his Maker, not only of his essential presence, which he has in common with all, but the presence of his grace; not only the sense of his being, but the support of his promise. God never appoints his servants to a difficult station, but he gives them the assurance of assistance in it, and of support under it. The solemn injunction, "Be strong, and work," thrice repeated by the prophet, to reprove the dilatory builders of the second temple, was effectually enforced by the animating promise which followed it, *I will be with you.* When the disciples were sent forth by their Divine Master to the grandest, but most perilous, task, to which ambassadors were ever appointed, they must have sunk under the conflicts which awaited, the dangers which threatened, and the deaths which met them; but the single promise,

*I will be with you*, was to them strength, and light, and life. The Christian militant, though called to a milder warfare, has the same reiterated assurance, *I will be with you always, even to the end of the world.*

## CHAP. XXV.

### CANDIDUS.

CANDIDUS is a genuine son of the Reformation; but, being a layman, he does not think it necessary to define his faith so constantly as some others do, by an incessant reference to the Liturgy, Articles, and Homilies, though this reference would accurately express his sentiments; but he observes, that it is become a kind of party standard equally erected by each side in intended opposition to the other, so that the equivocal ensign would not determine to which he belongs. He gives, however, the most indisputable proof of his zeal for these formularies, by the invariable conformity of his life and language to their principles.

From the warmth of his feelings, and the strength of his attachment to the church which fostered him, Candidus was once in no little danger of becoming a vehement party man; he was, however, cured by a certain reluctance he found in his heart to undertake to hate half the world, which he found must be a necessary consequence. Observation soon taught him, that Christians would be far more likely to escape

the attacks of unbelievers, if they could be brought to agree among themselves; but he saw, with regret, that religion, instead of being considered as a common cause, was split into factions, so that the general interest was neglected, not to say, in some instances, nearly betrayed. And while the liege subjects of the same sovereign are carrying on civil war for petty objects and inconsiderable spots of ground, that strength, which should have been concentrated for the general defence, is spent in mutual skirmishes, and mischievous though unimportant hostilities; and that veneration of course forfeited, with which even the acknowledged enemy would have been compelled to behold an united Church.

Candidus is, however, firm in his attachments, though not exacting in his requisitions; catholic, but not latitudinarian; tolerant, not from indifference, but principle. He contemplates, with admiration, the venerable fabric under whose shelter he is protected. He adheres to it, not so much from habit as affection. His adherence is the effect of conviction, otherwise his tenacity might be prejudice. It is founded in education, strengthened by reflection, and confirmed by experience. But though he contemplates our ecclesiastical institutions with filial reverence himself, he allows for the effect of education, habit, and conscience, in others, who do not view them with his eyes. He is sorry for those who

refuse to enter into her portal; he is more sorry for those who depart out of it; but far more concerned is he for those who remain within her pale, with a temper hostile to her interests; with principles foreign to her genius; with a conduct unsanctified by her spirit.

Like a true lover, he delights not to expatiate on any imperfection she may have; but he will not, like an absurd lover, insist on any imperfection as an excellence. Persuaded that a mole or a pimple is no material diminution of beauty, he will no more magnify them into a deformity than he will deny their existence. His mind is so occupied with essential points, and so satisfied with their substantial worth, that he relinquishes whatever is of no vital importance to those microscopic eyes, which, being able to take in only the diminutive, value themselves on the detection of specks, as a discovery of their own, though keener eyes had discerned them long before, but slighted them as insignificant. Satisfied that it is the best of all the churches which exist, he never troubles himself to inquire if it the best that is possible. In the Church of England he is contented with excellence, and is satisfied to wait for perfection till he is admitted a member of the Church triumphant.

Candidus made early the discovery of a secret which Charles the Fifth did not discover, till, by his ignorance of it, he had thinned the human race — the incurable diversity of human

opinions. This irremediable difference he turned to its only practical purpose, not the vain endeavour to convince others, but the less hopeless aim of improving his own forbearance. He even doubted whether this disagreement, though a misfortune in the aggregate, was not even more calculated to promote individual piety, than an uniformity which would not have called this feeling into exercise.

The more he examines Scripture (and he is habitually examining it), the more he is persuaded that the principles of his church are identical with the word of God; while he is enabled, by the same examination, to drink more deeply into that spirit of love which warms his heart with kindness towards every conscientious Christian who on some points thinks differently. His attachment is definite, but his charity knows no limits.

He observes that the loudest clamour for the Establishment is not always raised by the most pious, nor the most affectionate of her disciples; he therefore does not rejoice when he sees her honoured name hoisted as a political signal by those who are careless of her spiritual prosperity; and he sometimes finds no inconsiderable difference between those who toast her, and those who study to promote her best interests; though the former obtain the reputation, which the others are only solicitous to deserve. He evinces his own affection by his zeal in defend-

ing her cause when attacked, by his prudence in never causelessly provoking the attack. Anxious that the walls of the sacred temple should be impregnable, he is still more anxious that the fires of her altars should burn with undecaying brightness; and that, while her guardians are properly watching over the security of the one, the flame of the other be not extinguished. He gives the most unequivocal proof that he attends faithfully to her doctrines, by never separating them from her precepts, while he endeavours to incorporate both into his practice; adorning them by his example, recommending them in his writings, and illustrating them in his conversation.

If he produce little sensation among the intemperate, who exhibit their fidelity to the church by always representing her as on the very verge of destruction; yet he would, were the danger present, go greater lengths in her defence than some of her more declamatory champions; nay he does more now to avert her ruin, than they who seem to make her safety depend on their clamour. If he is not perpetually predicting open war, he is watchful against the hollow security of a false peace. The most difficult, but not the least important part of his care, is not more to vindicate her against avowed enemies, than against friends at once vociferous and supine.

Candidus, though a good lover, is a bad hater, and it is this defect of hatred, which, with a certain class, brings his love into suspicion. He has observed some who evince their attachment by their virulence against what they disapprove, rather than by cultivating, in support of what is right, that spirit which is "first pure, then peaceable," and which, if it be not peaceable, is not pure. These are more remarkable for their dread of external evils, than their solicitude for the promotion of internal piety. Their religion consists rather in repulsion than attraction. On the other hand, it must be observed, that Candidus has none of that pliancy, which, in this relaxed age, obtains, in a different quarter, the praise of liberality from those who, thinking one religion about as good as another, are of course tolerant of any, because indifferent to all.

He has learned from the errors of two opposite parties, that fanaticism teaches men to despise religion, and bigotry to hate it. He knows that his candour is esteemed laxity by the prejudiced, and his firmness intolerance by the irreligious. There is, however, no ambiguity in his moderation; and he never, for the sake of popularity with either party, leaves it doubtful on what ground he takes his stand. Nor does he ever renounce a right principle, because one party abuses it, or another denies its existence; and while he deprecates the assumption of *names*

by impostors, it does not alter his opinion of the *things* they originally signified; for instance, he does not think patriotism is a romance, nor disinterestedness a chimera, nor fervent piety a delusion, nor charity unorthodox, nor a saint necessarily a hypocrite.

He observes among his acquaintance, that there are some who sedulously endeavour to fix the brand of fanaticism on certain doctrines, which both the Bible and the Church not only recognise, but consider as fundamental, as the key-stone of the sacred arch on the strength of which our whole superstructure rests. These doctrines, while they eject them from their own creed, they confound, in the creed of others, with certain dangerous opinions, with which they are by no means necessarily connected, though they uniformly charge those who adopt the one class with invariably maintaining the other. It is in vain that the persons so charged disavow the opinions; it is to no purpose that they only desire to be allowed to know what they hold, and what they reject.

Candidus, however, undaunted by clamour, and unmoved by insinuation, tenaciously maintains the doctrine of human apostasy, of salvation by grace through faith, and of the influence of the Holy Spirit in renovating the heart. In her avowal of man's corruption, he insists that the church of England is most emphatical. "Read," said he one day, in earnest convers-

ation with one whom he could scarcely consider but as a virtual Socinian within the pale of the Establishment, "read the pointed and explicit confession with which her service opens." He holds the same language with some others to whom the Church is a higher authority than the Bible, in regard to a subject next in connection with that of human weakness, namely, the agency of the Divine Spirit: he remarks that both these doctrines are recognised in every prayer and in every office; that they are especially acknowledged in the *Collects*, those brief but beautiful effusions of devotion, which, for strength of expression, condensation of the sense, and neatness of composition, not only surpass every thing in the age in which they were composed, but remain unrivalled in the similar addresses of our own time, whose best praise it is, that, in this period of fine writing, our petitionary forms are accounted more or less excellent, as they approach nearer, or recede farther from, those models. Read their self-abasing acknowledgments — "Thou, God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do" — "O God, forasmuch as without Thee we are not able to please Thee" — "Because the frailty of man without Thee cannot but fall" — "Grant that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without Thee, may, by Thee, be enabled to live according to Thy will" — "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the

inspiration of Thy holy Spirit" — "Because through the weakness of our mortal nature, we can do no good thing without Thee, grant us the help of Thy grace."

But there would be no end of enumeration. The same doctrines run through, and are incorporated with, the whole Liturgy. To get rid of them, mere omissions would be altogether insufficient, we must tear up the whole web, we must weave another, we must weave it, too, with new materials; for the old threads would retain the colour of the old doctrines, and communicate the original character to the new piece; it is not only the old form that must be new cast, but new principles that must be infused, a new train of sentiments that must be adopted, in short, a new religion that must be substituted.

Candidus observes, that it is a proof how different the views of some of our contemporaries are on this subject from those of the primitive church, that while, with some of the former, Divine influence is a theme of derision, rather than of reverence; in the other, whatever was pure and holy, was ascribed to its operation. At the same time, being a diligent reader of ecclesiastical history, as well as an accurate observer of what passes before his eyes, he is aware what abuses have been and are still practised, and what deceits carried on, under pretence of being *the work of the Spirit.* The importance of the doctrine accounts for the imitations and

counterfeits to which it is exposed; and he knows that the abuse of a thing is always pernicious in proportion to its excellence. The Old and New Testament abound with instances. To those of the former St. Peter reverts, to guard his converts from those of the latter, — "There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you." Another apostle warns his hearers against the mischiefs which he himself had seen produced by these impious pretenders, by instructing them to "try the spirits, whether they be of God." Hence Candidus advises, with an able divine *, to try the spirits ourselves, not by putting them upon supernatural work, but to try them by a more infallible rule — by the doctrine they teach, that is, by its invariable conformity with Scripture. He thinks the same rule and the same necessity subsist now, in as full force, as when the injunction was given.

Candidus is aware that it is necessary not only to be accurate in the use of his own terms, but to be on his guard against being misled by the inaccuracy of the terms employed by others. He therefore takes care to ascertain the character and temper of the man by whom any ambiguous term is used, as well as of him to whom the term is applied; without this caution he could not decide on the justness of the application. Even the founder of the Epicurean sect

* Dr. Owen.

could say, *A man cannot live happily without living wisely.* Now, though every man, whatever be his principles, must assent to this truth as a general proposition, yet the phrase, "living wisely," conveyed a very different idea in the school of an atheistical philosopher, to what it would have conveyed in the follower of Zeno, and more especially in the disciple of Christ. Enthusiasm is one of these ambiguous terms.

Candidus is prudent on a principle which is sometimes denied. He considers that prudence is, in an ardent character, more likely to be an effect of grace than even zeal; because in the exercise of zeal he is indulging his natural temper, whereas in the other case he is subduing it; and he has found that to resist a propensity is generally more the effect of principle than to gratify it. Hence, he infers that if resistance be a work of grace, the sluggish and the cold-hearted may judge of their own conquest over nature by a superinduced zeal, while he presumes *he* is conquering his own vehemence by a superinduced prudence; thus the same truth is illustrated by directly opposite instances.

Against enthusiasm, therefore, it is unnecessary to caution the discreet and enlightened Candidus. He avoids it as naturally as a wise man avoids folly, as a sober man shuns extravagance. But then it is the thing itself, and not what bigots call so; it is the real entity, and not the spectre, against which he is on his

guard; for, not being superstitious, he is not terrified by phantoms and goblins. He laments when he encounters a real enthusiast, because he knows that even if honest, he is pernicious. But though he thinks him highly blamable, he does not think him worse "than murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers." He thinks enthusiasm mischievous, but he does not think it worse than impiety, worse than intemperance, worse than infidelity, worse than intolerance, worse than any other flagitious vice; especially he does not think it worse than all the other vices put together. Yet this he might be almost tempted to believe was the case, when he sees other vices comparatively left to enjoy themselves, and this doughty enormity, imaginary as well as real, singly attacked with the combined force of all the weapons which ought to be in turn applied to the whole family of sin. As he is very skilful in symptoms, he takes care to ascertain evident marks of the mania, palpable diagnostics of the rabid bite, before he pronounces on the disease, or proceeds to secure himself from the contagion.

By his well-exercised judgment, he can generally discover the different causes of the actual distemper. He can distinguish whether the patient is sick of a deluded imagination, or from having been in contact with the infected; whether he is mismanaged by artful, or injured by ignorant prescribers; whether the malady lies in the weakness of his natural powers, the

agitation of his animal spirits, or the vanity of his mind — whether it be an inflammation on the brain, or a tumour in the heart — some or all of these appearances commonly indicating the fanatical fever. In either case, he heartily subscribes to the reality and danger of the distemper, but even then he does not positively pronounce that the weak are wicked, or the disordered counterfeits.

But if, as is not seldom the case, he finds the appellation conferred only because the objects of it are deeply sensible of the unspeakable importance of religion, and the infinite value of eternal things — because they are no more afraid of feeling than of understanding the great truths of Christianity — because they think their souls are not a property to be complimented away through fear; if he find, that with all their warmth they are rational, with all their zeal they are humble, with all their energy they are consistent, with all their spirituality they are sober; if they obey the precepts of the Gospel as faithfully as they believe its doctrines — if their religion do not lie more in profession than in performance — if they give a striking evidence of their love of God, by their tenderness to their fellow-creatures — if they are as liberal to their bodily wants, as those are, who forget to take their souls into the account — if their piety appear as much in their practice as in their discourse, and their prudence

keep pace with their earnestness, then he will not be forward to impute to them, as the unpardonable sin, those animated sentiments which are to themselves "peace and joy in believing," and to others benignity, philanthropy, and kindness.

And as he does not call well-directed zeal fanaticism, nor generous ardour delirium, so he does not rank those who believe in the omnipotence of Divine grace among the enemies to virtuous action; nor does he suspect that the advocates for strenuous exertion are sworn foes to faith. Nor does he ever disavow a doctrine, which he has adopted on conviction, because it may happen to be associated in the mind of another man, with other doctrines which he himself cannot adopt. And as he knows something of the internal constitution of the human heart and the nature of religious affections, he distinguishes between the sanguine temper of youth, between that warmth which, in a rightly turned mind, time will cool, and experience temper, and which will retain no more than a due degree of spirit, when its first effervescence has subsided; he distinguishes this spirit from that blind zeal and headlong violence, which as they are a part of no religion, so they are a discredit to any.

He has observed, that the reason why we see such mis-shapen representations of religion set up for the finger of reproach or ridicule to

point at, is that the reviler has not been looking out for truth: he has not taken his draught, we will not say from the highest model, but from the fair average of serious Christians; but he has taken it from the lowest specimen of what he has seen, and even more commonly from the distorted report of others. He was looking out for absurdity, and where it is studiously sought, it will not be difficult to find; and, if not found, it will be easily imagined. This caricature he produces as the representative of the whole body; taking care, however, to preserve in his portrait just resemblance enough to show a feature or two of the real face, that the disgusting and exaggerated physiognomy may not prevent its being recognised. If no glimpse of likeness could be traced, it would not answer the end; it would answer it still less, if the prevailing character of the piece were not deformity.

Candidus is persuaded that, of every combination of wickedness with folly which Satan has devised, hypocrisy is the greatest, as being the most generally unprofitable. The hypocrite is sure of being the abhorrence of both sides of the question. Where his duplicity is not suspected, the world hates him for the *appearance* of piety; God, who knows the heart, hates him for the abuse and the affectation of it. But, though Candidus deprecates hypocrisy, he is cautious of suspecting it on light grounds, still more of charging it home without proof. As he

is not omniscient, he cannot be quite sure that any man who appears more than usually pious *is* a hypocrite, nor does he so denominate him on that single ground. As he cannot scrutinise his heart, he judges him by his actions, and leaves him to settle his motives with his Maker.

On the whole, if he meet with a man, the consistency of whose life gives stronger evidence of the reality and depth of his religion than other men, he is reluctant in suspecting him either of hypocrisy or enthusiasm. So far from it, he will find his own faith strengthened, his own victory over the world confirmed, his own indifference to human applause increased, by such a living exemplification of the truth of Christianity, and calmly leave it to the inconsiderate, the incompetent, and the malevolent, to stigmatise the character which he reveres.

They who, when they observe eminent piety and zeal much above low-water mark, insinuate that such symptoms in the more animated Christian prove his tendency to be a separatist, pay a very wretched compliment to the Established Church. Is it not implying that her service is not sufficiently high and enlarged to satisfy an energetic spirit; that she does not possess attractions to engage, and materials to fill, and spirit to warm a devout mind; but that a superior degree of earnestness will be in danger of driving its possessor to stray without her pale in search of richer pastures? Is it not virtually

saying one of two things, either that a fervent piety is bad, or that the church is not good?

With Candidus, this is so far from being the case, he is so little "given to change," that he rejoices in belonging to a church of whose formularies we have already seen how much he had to say in commendation. In these standards he rejoices to see Truth, as it were, pinned down, hedged in, and, as far is possible, in this mutable world, preserved and perpetuated. Her significant and spiritual ordinances, and the large infusion of Scripture in her Offices and Liturgy, secure her from the fluctuations of human opinion; so that, if ever the principles of any of her ministers should degenerate, her service would be protected from the vicissitude. No sentiments but those of her prescribed ritual can ever find their way into the desk, and the desk will always be a safe and permanent standard for the pulpit itself, as well as a test by which others may ascertain its purity.

He values her government for the same reason for which he values her Liturgy, because it gives a definite bound to the inclosure, never forgetting that the fruit inclosed is of deeper importance than the fence which incloses. He always remembers, however, that at no very remote period, when the hedge was broken down, disorder and misrule overspread the fair vineyard.

Among other doctrines, he is an accurate studier of the doctrine of proportions, in

whatever regards the ecclesiastical institution. Though he cordially approves her forms and discipline, though he believes they are not only essential to her dignity, but necessary to her existence, yet he discriminates between what is subordinate and what is supreme. If the one is the body, the other is the soul. It is to her strenuously maintaining the doctrines of the New Testament, that he looks for her preservation. This is her Palladium. Nor does it more resemble the fabled statute of Ilium, because, like that, it fell from heaven to earth, than in its having dropped down *while the Prince was building the citadel.*

If he adopt the Liturgy for his model, it is because he perceives how completely she has adopted the Bible for hers, in never giving undue prominence to one doctrine to the disparagement of the rest; like *her*, he appreciates and settles them according to their due degrees of importance.

Among his many reasons for venerating the Church of England, the principal is, that she is an integral and distinguished portion of the Church of Christ. In the specific, he never loses sight of the generic character; as a Churchman, he is first a Christian, and a Protestant. The ramification, so far from separating him from the root, unites him more closely to it. If he bear much fruit, it is because he is inserted into the true vine; and the same candour which

he exercises towards theirs, disposes him to believe that they entertain for his church sentiments of no inferior liberality. In many members of those which differ from his own, more in forms of government, than in any of the essentials of doctrine, he sees powerful ability and sound learning to admire, and much substantial piety to venerate. Even with regard to that church from the corruptions and spiritual tyranny of which our own has been providentially rescued, he acknowledges much excellence in those missals from which our own ritual was partly extracted; he sees in many of her writers a genius, a sublimity, and an unction, that have rarely been surpassed. In short, he exercises charity and kindness to all sects and all parties, except one, a sect which has lately been well animadverted on. It is not, indeed, a distinct sect; it is not a separate community, for then his prudence might escape all contact with it; but it is one whose sloth, producing the same insinuating effect which the subtlety of the Jesuits formerly produced, without giving us, like the school of Loyola, any hope of its extinction, has found means to thrust not a few of its followers into every religious denomination and society in the world — the sect of the *Non-doers*.

In these worst of sectaries, no vaunting profession of faith, no flaming display of orthodoxy, no clamour for favourite, no hostility against re-

probated doctrines, no outcry for or against the church or the state, will ever raise them in his estimation. He accounts them the barren fig-tree of every community in whose soil they spring up. They may, indeed, claim to belong to it, but it is as the worm belongs to the root, the canker to the bud, the excrescence to the healthful body.

In the constitution of the Established Church, Candidus approves the degrees of rank and dignity, and the gradations of income. But, if he never entertains a desire that the highest were lower, he cannot help breathing a cordial wish that the lowest were higher. Convinced, however, that every thing human is in its very nature imperfect, he consoles himself with the hope, a hope which is confirmed by actual instances, that some of the most highly endowed will be examples of Christian liberality, and some of the most lowly, of patient submission; so that their several portions may, while they enable them to furnish a pattern to others, minister to their own eternal good.

But evils which he cannot remove, he will never aggravate. He holds it criminal even to agitate questions which only foster and inflame the wounds they are meant to cure: he knows that fruitless discussion may irritate, but seldom heals; that querulous animadversions on irremediable grievances only serve, by stirring up discontent, to excite insubordination.

He respects every order and degree among them for the Lord's sake; and, if a case should occur in which he cannot honour the man, he will honour his office. If called on for his opinion as to any defect, his censures are discreet; if not called upon, he is silent. But if his censures, when just, are temperate, his commendations, when merited, are cordial. Above all, he holds the practice to be equally dishonest, disingenuous and vulgar, to make communities and bodies answerable for the faults and errors of individuals; while he never commends or vindicates any thing decidedly wrong, either in individuals or in communities.

## CHAP. XXVI.

### THE ESTABLISHED CHRISTIAN.

We have it on the authority of a fine writer, that *not to know what occurred before we were born, is to be always a child.* Yet while the intellect may be improved to the highest pitch by this antecedent knowledge, the will and the passions may, notwithstanding our study of the most elaborate discussions on their nature and effects, remain in the same state of childish imbecility. History and philosophy, though they inform the understanding, and assist the judgment, cannot rectify the obliquities of the heart.

The experience of all past ages has produced such an accumulated mass of disappointment, such a long unbroken series of mortification, such a reiterated conviction of the emptiness of this world, and of the insufficiency of its power to confer happiness, that one would be ready to imagine, that to every fresh generation, nay, to every period of the life of every individual in every generation, wisdom would not have all her admonitions to begin over again. One would not think that the same truths require, not only to be afresh

pressed upon us, but to be again unfolded; to be repeated as if all previous experiment had never been tried, as if all foregoing admonition had either never been given, or had been completely obliterated; as if the world were about to begin on a fresh stock of materials, to set out on an untried set of principles, as if it were about to enter on an original course of action of which preceding ages had left no precedent; on a line of conduct of which our forefathers had bequeathed no instances of failure, had experienced no defeat of expectation.

We read perpetually of multitudes, who lived in the long indulgence of unbounded appetite, who, in the gratification of every desire, had drained the world to its last dregs; but does the narrative of ages record a single instance, that the end proposed and followed up in the fervent pursuit, I mean happiness, was ever attained? We contemplate these recorded examples, we lament the disgusts, and pity the mortifications of the disappointed; but who applies the knowledge to any practical use, to any personal purpose? We are informed, but we are not instructed. We resolve, in full confidence of our own wisdom, and complete contempt for that of our predecessors, to make the experiment for ourselves. We, too, pursue the same end, and probably by the same path; secure that we shall escape the mistakes into which others have fallen, assured that we shall avoid the evils which they

have incurred, evils which we attribute to their ignorance, or their neglect, to their error, or their indiscretion.

We set out fresh adventurers in the old track. We weary our wits, we waste our fortune, we exhaust our spirits. Still we are persuaded that *we* have devised the expedient of which our precursors were ignorant; that *we* have hit on the very discovery which had eluded their search; that *we* have found the ingredient, which they, in mixing up the grand compound, earthly happiness, had overlooked.

The natural and pressing object of our desire is present enjoyment; those, therefore, who gratify our wayward fancies, or remove from us any immediate inconvenience, are sure of our favour. On them we seize as instruments for promoting our schemes of gratification, forgetting that they have schemes of their own to promote; that they are equally looking to us for our instrumentality; and that, if they are making any undue sacrifices to us, it is but in order to the furtherance of those schemes. Such is mere worldly friendship. As the intellectual eye seldom runs along the whole train of consequences, which is the only true way of taking our measure of things, the same principle which attaches us to the friend who is humouring us, makes us murmur at the dispensations of Him who is correcting us, dispensations which, though painful at the moment, may, by a train of circumstances of which we know neither the design nor

the process, be insuring to us future benefits. But having no clear perception of remote good, we have no very ardent desires after it. Our short-sightedness concurs with our selfishness in making this false estimate.

Divine goodness, which we perhaps have hitherto withstood, at length, when He who gives the grace gives the desire, touches the heart so long closed against it. The still small voice which was drowned in the noise and tumult of the world is at length heard, and, through longer forbearance, and farther communications of that grace, is at length obeyed. Religion operating on the convictions of the heart, and our humility improving with the experience of our own mistakes, gradually remove the veil through which we had hitherto beheld the world.

As the heavenly light grows stronger, the false lights, drawn from the exhalations of sensuality and self-indulgence, which at once glimmer and mislead, are quenched. The day-star begins to dawn. In this clearer atmosphere, objects assume their proper shape; every thing appears in its true colours. The mind is insensibly disenchanted, the views take another turn. As the eye attains a more distinct sight, the desires acquire a juster aim. We discover that the best things on earth have an inseparable imperfection appended to them. Referring to our past experience, or present clearer observation of things, we find that the delights which we

fancied were indefectible are dying away; we find that pleasure dissolves, wit misleads, riches corrupt, power intoxicates, hope deceives, possession disappoints; — and, which now stamps upon our renewed feelings the deepest impression of the vanity of human things, difficulties sink our spirits, success agitates them: we find that what we want, we desire with a painful ardency; what we have, we either fear to enjoy, or the enjoyment is poisoned by the fear of losing it; and that intense delight could not long be borne, even if it could be obtained. The convictions of the Christian being settled, he is now desirous of imparting the benefits of his own experience to his younger friends; who, in their turn, commonly reject the transfer, thinking him to be as much mistaken as he had formerly thought his predecessors — like him, they prefer the experiment to the advice, the risk to the caution.

The sober thinker is now convinced, that between the fever of desire, the uncertainty of attainment, the disappointment attending what is attained, the alternation of hope and fear, the dread of the worst things, and the insuppressible sense of the brevity of the best, the mere man of the world can never be substantially happy. The Christian thus warned, thus wakened, is thankful, not for the mistakes he has committed, but for the salutary vexations that have attended them. The monitory wisdom of

past ages rises in his esteem, in the same proportion as his own sinks. Above all, he has found, that there is no infallible wisdom but in the oracles of inspiration; there he looks for whatever is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." There only he has found, that the "man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In perusing the sacred records, he even derives consolation from what has been a source of derision to the profane, and of wonder to the ignorant — the fidelity with which the inspired writers have exhibited holy men, in the most censurable instances of their conduct, and in the lowest stages of their hope and confidence. He there beholds the chosen servants of God wading through doubts and apprehensions, assaulted by temptations, perplexed by trials. Had they never been presented but in their happier seasons, but in their triumphs and their victories, the comparison with his own failures, with his own occasional depressions and fluctuations, would have sunk his spirits which they now support, would have weakened his faith which they now confirm.

He rejoices in the Gospel as a stream flowing from the fountain of love and mercy, the spring of all spiritual life and motion; he finds that genuine Christianity differs from every other good, as spirit differs from matter. It establishes the foundation of happiness as well as

goodness: and both, not on any supposed merit in the recipient, but on the free mercy and voluntary grace of God. While it exacts obedience to the divine law, it shows that the requisition cannot be complied with, but by divine assistance; what it commands, it bestows; if it requires the will, it confers the power.

In the retrospect of his past life, he is astonished at the patience and forbearance of God under his own repeated provocations; especially, he reflects with wonder, that the very prosperity which had been the special gift of his Maker, had alienated his heart from him. He is humbled to think, that it was in the very arms of his goodness he forgot him; when he tasted most abundantly of his bounty, then it was he neglected him most; when he most largely enjoyed his overflowing beneficence, the gift induced not gratitude, but intoxication. He looks back with remorse on the time he has wasted, and the errors he has committed, but he does not spend his remaining strength so much in regretting as in repairing them.

To be enchanted with things which have not much in them, he now finds is the mark of a weak and undistinguishing mind. It shows the absence of a rational understanding, and the want of a manly spirit, to be inordinately attached to any object, whose worth will not bear out our judgment, and vindicate our attachment. Habitual considerations on the littleness of pre-

sent things, the disappointing nature of all earthly enjoyments, the grandeur of his future prospects, with nearer views of the eternal world, all combine to give continence to his mind, moderation to his desires, and sobriety to his conduct.

We are slow in making the discovery of the large capacity of the human mind: that it is made capable of a felicity commensurate to its nature; that the rudiments, both of eternal misery and happiness, are laid in our souls here. Being endued with such faculties and powers for seeking the favour of God, and such means and graces for attaining to his presence, the Christian finds that the misery must be proportionate in missing it. He has also learned, that it is not the design of the Gospel merely to announce to us a state of future blessedness, but to fit us for it. It is but half the work of infinite love to provide a heaven for man; it is its completion to make man a suitable recipient of the bliss prepared for him. Without this gracious provision, Christianity had been a scheme to tantalise, and not to save us. He sees that there is a higher destination for the passions than that to which he has hitherto applied them. Those affections which had been parcelled out, and severally fastened on their respective vanities, are now concentrated and devoted to God. Love, joy, hope, desire, the very propensities which have formerly misled him, having found

their true object, now ripen him for that state from which they had long seduced him; each contributes its quota towards framing him into a disposition for happiness, and to prepare him for its ultimate enjoyment.

He has long since discovered that the best pleasures of earth are drawn from cisterns, not fountains, that our most prized delights are neither pure in themselves, nor permanent in their duration. The immortal mind cannot be satisfied in the pursuit, nor even in the enjoyment. They cannot confer what they do not possess, perfection and stability. Things perishable themselves cannot satisfy the desires of beings made for eternity. The soul cannot exert its full powers, nor unfold its whole nature, nor display all its operations on this contracted stage. "The bed is narrower than that a man can stretch himself on it." There is no proportion between such a scanty space and such large capabilities, such trivial pleasures and such boundless desires, such a fleeting duration and a spirit formed for immortality.

He has found that it is of pressing necessity that this futurity be a happy one, otherwise the very circumstance that it is endless, which makes the happiness complete, turns against us, and makes the consummation of our misery. It is difficult to say whether the shortness of the time allotted us to secure this futurity, or the eternity of the state to be secured, should most

stimulate our religious exertions. We have frequently spoken of the duty of learning of an enemy—here the lesson is peculiarly awakening. The reason assigned in the vision of St. John why the *great* enemy is working with such powerful energy, is, because *the time is short.* Shall we be equally assured of the brevity of our own time, and yet be less active in securing our salvation, than he is in promoting our destruction?

The boundlessness of the Divine perfections presents to the soul the widest range for the exercise of faith and love, and the Gospel teaches the most unshaken confidence of happiness in the death of Christ. But that God is the King *eternal and immortal,* is to us the broad basis on which all the rest of the promises are built. It would moderate the delight with which we consider his attributes, if eternity were not annexed to them; his immortality alone being the pledge and security of ours. "The weight of glory" announced by the Apostle derives its highest value from its being an *eternal* weight.

Of the joys of heaven there is in Scripture no description. This is wisely avoided, as the tastes, desires, and inclinations of men are so different; one conceiving that to be of the very essence of happiness, for which another has little relish. They are intimated by negatives, or by shadows, figures, and images of things, to which a general idea of enjoyment is annexed. There is only

one idea respecting heaven, which is clear, and plain, and definite — its *eternity*. Of duration every man has some precision in his ideas. Other delineations might have led to dispute; but if the different notions of the nature of happiness might have kindled debate; about its immortality there can be but one opinion. Perpetuity gives the finishing stamp to perfection.

And as we frame our ideas of eternity from what we know of duration; so we frame our faint notions of God from what we conceive of goodness. We meditate on the excellences of the highest created spirits, and then imagine something of God, though inconceivably elevated above that poor conception, yet not contradictory to it. We fill our mind with the idea of wisdom, goodness, knowledge, power, holiness, justice, purity, and to each of these attributes we prefix that of infinite; never forgetting that God is almost as much above our excellences as our weaknesses. Yet we can but ascribe to Him all that we feel or can imagine of perfection, and we should be still more lost in the mere abstract notion, if we had not some sensible feelings, though infinitely imperfect, derived from reality and exemplification.

The Christian must fill his vocation to the last. In this or that profession men are looking forward to the period when they may lay it down with safety and honour: the Christian's safety and honour consist in his carrying it on

to the end. But there is between them this point of agreement. The man of business contracts his schemes, diminishes his labours, mitigates his activity, all with a view to his ultimate repose. If the religious man act thus, he does it with another view, and to a higher end. If he seek rest from his toils, it is in order to find a surer rest in God; if he contract his schemes, it is that he may enlarge his views. There is no specific period in which he can say, My work is done, till he lies down in the grave, where no man can work. He now finds that the tranquillity of his occupations, the beauties of nature, the peaceful pleasures of retirement, pleasures the most natural and congenial to the mind of unsophisticated man, would still be too little to fill his desires; that they would leave a melancholy void in his heart, without the sense of *His* presence whose gift they are. While a consciousness both of the presence and favour of God gives a relish to every enjoyment, and heightens even common comforts into blessings.

There is a progression in the habits of a Christian. In the advancement of his course his pursuits are probably slower, but his interruptions are fewer. If his progress be even less obvious, less apparently active, he is perhaps more substantially improving, more spiritually advancing. When, from the infirmities of declining life, he may seem to be doing nothing, he may then be doing most. If he is able to

look less abroad, he is looking more within. He begins to taste more of the fruits of that victory which the Apostle describes as the evidence of a renovated heart; to give this best proof that he is "born of God," "he overcometh the world." This, if one of his latest, is one of his most important conquests. But though he has turned away his eyes from the world, because it never satisfied the desires of his heart, he endeavours to the last to serve it with much more sedulity than when he looked to it for his happiness.

He has long been persuaded, that even in this present low state of being, we must attain something of the rudiments of future happiness. He has learned that the first principles must be formed now, which are to have their consummation in heaven. To look forward to the completion of a state and character of which we have not so much as begun to acquire the elements, is not acting according to any of the analogies of common life. The beginning and the process of any thing we have in contemplation always partake in an inferior, but still in a similar and progressive measure, of the nature of the end. It has the same properties and tendencies, in its initial state, with that which is hereafter to be completed. We must begin to lay in our hearts the foundation both of the knowledge and love of God, if we would hereafter attain to

that perfection in both, which we are told is of the essence of the heavenly happiness.

He has long found that there is no peace to the mind that does not entertain some one ultimate end. Broken views and mixed designs distract its attention, and corrode its quiet. In most of the enterprises of life, a man, besides being absorbed by present and perhaps opposing schemes, is looking anxiously forward to some point of change. He has no sooner framed one project, but his views are penetrating to something beyond it; something which he shall adopt as soon as he shall have accomplished all his proximate objects. Thus the projecting, and fluctuating, and prospective mind, is never at rest. There is no stability but in God. No grand aim, no fixed position, no ultimate end, but in Him. He who has once chosen his Redeemer for his portion, is subject to no more vicissitudes; has no after-reference, no remoter pursuit, no further design in reserve.

He, however, who makes heaven his aim, and God his end, will not, therefore, live idly, as if, his choice being decided, his object being settled, he had nothing more to do. His object is indeed fixed, his choice is irreversibly determined, his portion is unalterably decided; but that which elevates his desires also enlarges his capacities, so that his pursuit never ceases, his search is never finished, nor ever can be, unless the perfections of its object could be exhausted.

Mr. Boyle observes of a certain mineral, that a man may consume his whole life in the study of it, without ever arriving at the knowledge of all its properties. How much more shall he who seeks to "acquaint himself with God," find that his entire life is too short, his whole powers too small, to find out the Almighty to perfection! This he will never completely accomplish on earth, yet his desires will grow with his attainments.

But as the happiness of a Christian is chiefly in prospect, he joyfully looks forward to its glorious consummation in a better world. "When I awake up after thy likeness I shall be satisfied," a plain intimation that till then we shall not be satisfied. From different passages of Scripture, we collect that the happiness of heaven consists in seeing God, in participating his likeness, in being satisfied with it. But how shall this blessedness be perfected hereafter, if the desire, if the endeavour, does not originate here? If there be no preliminary acquaintance begun with him who ransomed us with his blood, can we expect to dwell with him in eternal glory? "Not to know God" is the portentous omen of being "punished with everlasting destruction from his presence." It is unspeakably distressing to apprehend, that this may possibly be the awful description of some, who are by no means destitute of credit or character; who go on without ever enter-

taining a conception, that such a beginning may be connected with such an end.

All the delineations of future misery, all the pictures of a disturbed imagination, all the terrors with which a restless conscience anticipates its torments, all the accumulated images by which Revelation describes it, whether under the figure of the fire that is never quenched, or the worm that never dies, are but inferior degrees of this terrible climax, "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord!" All the doleful conceptions of unimaginable woe, all the shades and shapes of substantial, unutterable wretchedness, are comprised in this hopeless, ever-during exile. What the soul suffers, there is no attempt to describe, what it loses, is but faintly presented to the imagination. On the other hand, "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath the heart of man conceived," the final state of bliss. And it is observable that the two extremes are both most emphatically conveyed by negatives. We are only assured that assimilation with God is the perfection of joy, banishment from his presence the extremity of woe.

There is nothing that more humbles and abases the established Christian, than that, whilst in his happier moments he is able to figure to himself a cheering image of the glory of the Redeemer, the blessedness of the redeemed, the beauty of Christian perfection; to

feel himself not only awakened, but exalted; not merely enlightened, but kindled, almost possessing, rather than anticipating, heaven; while he is enabled, in a joyful measure, to meditate upon these things, to feel his mind ennobled and his soul expanded by the contemplation, yet to find how soon the bright ideas fade, the strong impression is effaced, the heavenly vision vanished: he mourns to reflect, that he does not more abidingly possess in his heart, that he does not more powerfully exhibit in his conversation, more forcibly display in his life, that spirit of which his heart was lately so full, of which his mind was so enamoured. Cast down by these reflections, he still learns —painful lesson! —that "those *must* sow in tears who would reap in joy;" that it is not expectation, but possession, which excludes all sense of sorrow; that it is heaven itself, and not the promise of it, that is to "wipe all tears from our eyes." His happiness in this life will, on these accounts, be as far below perfection as his goodness; and when we speak of his joy and felicity, it must be understood, rather of a comparative, than an absolute happiness. It is the joy of hope rendered sure by faith. The soul will not be completely blessed till the body is disanimated, its temptations removed, and its infirmities at an end.

The Christian, as life wears away, must not be discouraged, if he feel not always those

fervours, which once appeared to him inseparable from real piety. It is not, perhaps, that his piety is less sincere, but that years and infirmity, which have impaired his natural energy of character, may affect, or seem to affect, the liveliness of his devotion; but it may be mellowed, without being decayed; he will not too much distress himself by mistaking that, for a diminution of grace, which may be only a wearing out of nature. Or it may be, that the principle, which is become habitual, may not, for that very reason, strike the mind so forcibly as on its more early adoption, yet it may have sunk deeper into his heart. There may be more *proportion* in his religion; all its component parts may be more balanced: there is more evenness in his character; more virtues, but of a less ostensible kind, are collected into it than he formerly thought necessary. His piety is at once more solid, and more spiritual, more operative, yet more serene. His principles have somewhat of a different call for their exercise: the efforts he formerly made to resist temptations of a bolder character, are now exerted to repel the incursions of peevishness, the allurements of indolence, the murmurs of impatience. Qualities which he once relinquished to the unconverted, as thinking them merely natural, he now carefully cherishes. Cheerfulness, once considered as the mere flow of animal spirits, is cultivated as a Chris-

tian grace; for it does not now spring from nature, but triumphs over it.

He is not so eager in support of some particular opinions as formerly, because each doctrine now maintains its proper place, and due importance, in his mind. If he make religion less a subject of discussion, he trusts it is become a more practical principle. His views are more deep, his judgment more just, his convictions more firmly rooted. There is a finer edge to his virtues, for they are now sheathed in humility; and this quality, the crowning point, and soundest evidence of a renovated mind, by rendering him more distrustful of himself, more candid in his opinions, and more temperate in his language, will have checked that forwardness of debate, rashness of decision and impatience with error, which, with the less enlightened, might formerly have given him the appearance of a more animated Christian.

But the more his character improves, the more he looks out of himself for his final happiness. His trust in his Redeemer increases in exact proportion to those virtues of which that trust is the source, virtues on which too many others invite him to rest his dependence.

Some Christians, in their outset, are disposed to lay an almost exclusive stress on duties, without sufficiently cultivating the spirit which should prompt them; others too much

overlook duties, relying on certain fervours for supplying their place. The established Christian is careful never to relax in duties, even though they are not attended with that energy which once gave more animation to the exercise. There may be in them a less sensible acting of the affections, which are naturally more alive in the active season of life, yet without any diminution of the real principle of piety; there will be rather an increased devotedness, an augmented acquiescence of the will, a more complete consecration of heart and spirit, to the only legitimate object of their entire affection.

He will, however, be solicitous, that if the flame emit not such vivid flashes, as when it was first lighted, yet that it shall burn more steadily, more equably; especially will he be vigilant, that he do not insensibly transfer to other objects that ardour which used to give life and spirit to his piety, and that while he fears he is not so much alive to God, it is because he is more alive to the world. Though others cannot fairly judge of his internal state, yet there is this sure test by which he will judge himself: if the natural tempers be not more subdued, if the irascible passions retain their vehemence, if pride and selfishness maintain their sway, while the religious feelings alone are grown obtuse, it is an alarming symptom, a plain intimation, that religion has indeed lost, or rather, it is to be

feared, that it never had obtained the supreme place in his heart.

And as he has observed, that in some vehement characters the lamp of religious fervour was first kindled by the fire of natural passions, so its flame declines with the declension of the natural powers; he is also aware, that there is a possibility to the Christian, as he advances in years, of a growing supineness, the too natural effect of which is a decay of the vital spirit of religion. This makes him tremble when he reflects that the same awful warning which, in the vision of the Apocalypse, "the Spirit gives to the churches," is addressed with equal emphasis to every individual Christian. He remembers that this compassionate Spirit, which succours us when tempted, strengthens us when persecuted, intercedes for us when afflicted, has promised no such soothing tenderness under declining piety. His language to the decaying Christian, as well as to the lukewarm church, is that of alarming menace. This gradual apostasy is the only case, because it is a hopless one, in which he threatens final rejection. It is, indeed, infinitely grievous, when they, whom this blessed Spirit has enlightened, in whom he has excited devout dispositions and holy tempers, visibly sink below the state in which they once stood. In the volume of inspiration, every complaint, every expostulation, every argument which long-suffering goodness could suggest, every entreaty

which insulted mercy could devise, is exhausted; nothing is omitted which can invigorate relaxing principle, nothing is neglected which can reanimate decaying piety.

The advanced Christian, therefore, will guard against the too natural delusion of imposing on himself the belief, that a declension in spiritual vigour is only natural decay. But he will guard against it by watching its sensible and visible effects. He will discern, whether he sets less value on the things which are passing away; whether his attachment to the world diminishes, while his prayers for its prosperity and improvement increase; whether he is as zealous in promoting good works by his purse and his influence, as he was, in the days of health and strength, by his personal exertions.

The confirmed Christian exemplifies the emphatical description of the good man in Scripture, "he *walks* with God." He does not merely approach him at stated times; he does not ceremoniously address him on great occasions only, and then retreat, and dwell at a distance; but he *walks* with him, his habitual intercourse, his natural motion, his daily converse, his intimate communication, is with his Redeemer: and he remembers that walking not only implies intercourse, but progress. His graces, if not more sincere, are more universal; he knows, and he endeavours to act upon the knowledge, that a Christian must be holy in

" *all manner* of conversation;" that excellences in some part of his character will not atone for allowed defects in any.

In the still remaining varieties of this changing scene, not knowing to what particular trials he may yet be called, he will have endeavoured to bring a general preparedness of spirit to every event. When he can no longer *do* the will of God by his accustomed exertions, he can, with a submission which is worn into a habit, *suffer* it. That which is the crime of an ordinary man, is his highest attainment:—*he can submit to be useless.* He will cheerfully resign himself to be discharged from services, in which his former happiness had consisted. He will contentedly see himself laid by, though still stout in heart, and firm in spirit. He will kindly assist those who are rising up to fill the place which he is about to leave vacant, by his counsel, his experience, his prayers. He can rejoice, that though the servant fails, the service is and will be supplied.

He will continue more assiduously to labour after that consistency of character, which is a more unequivocal evidence of high Christian attainment, than the most prominent great qualities, which are frequently counteracted by their opposites. This consistency exhibits a more striking conformity to the image of his Maker; as in the works of creation, the wisdom of the Supreme Intelligence is more admirable in the

agreement and harmony of one thing with another, than in the individual beauty and excellence of each. It is more conspicuous, in the fitness and proportion of its parts relatively, than in the composition of the parts themselves. By this uniformity, the results of religion are the most beautifully exhibited in the Christian character.

And as a real Christian is, allowing for human infirmity, consistent with himself, so the same consistency is discoverable in the general features of all Christians. However men may differ in their natural character, yet there is, in all true believers, a sort of correspondent feeling, as well as common principle, which draws their affections to each other, as well as their hearts and faculties to one common source and centre. It is not a traditionary religion which attracts them to the faith of their ancestors, nor is it a party-feeling which attaches them to some particular society, but it is a divinely infused principle, communicated by the Spirit of God; it is identified in all its essentials; and a genuine Christian is radically the same being, wherever he is found, and under whatever difference of circumstances he exists.

The nearer he approaches to God, the more, in one sense, he will be sensible of his distance from him. Higher views of God's unspeakable holiness, a deeper sense of his own unworthiness, act reciprocally, and confirm each other. Yet

this growing consciousness of his distance only serves to augment his love. He more and more feels the goodness of God, in having never cast off human nature, in having, immediately on its apostasy, conceived the gracious design to repair its evils, and restore its dignity. He feels, in its full force, that unspeakable consolation which the disciples of the most sublime of all the Pagan philosophers lamented was wanting in their religion; they regretted that *between the pure divinity and the impure creature, as there is no union, so there can be no communion.* Can any thing more strikingly demonstrate how completely the Mediator provides for that want, and establishes that communion? "It is thus," as a very learned and pious writer has observed, "that the Gospel doctrine gives full relief of mind and ease of conscience, as well as encouragement to piety, and discouragement to sin." * It gives not only future hope, but present peace; it is not all in promise, it is much in hand.

Through the silent, but effectual, operations of grace, obedience is become acquiescence, duty is transformed, not only into assent, but choice. If even a heathen could say, Lead me to whatsoever I am appointed, and I will *follow thee, but if I am unwilling, still I will follow thee,* no wonder if the confirmed Christian serves God not so much because he is bound to serve

* John Smith.

him, as because love is the dictate of his heart, affection the voluntary bent of his disposition. He needs no extraneous attraction, the impulse is from within. The raw recruit requires to be allured by the "fife and spirit-stirring drum;" but the veteran soldier follows the service because he loves it, follows it for its own sake. There is no longer any violence done to nature, for the nature is made conformable to the object; the love of Christ constrains him, contrary principles are reconciled, opposite propensities are blended into one, and that one a blessed, though still imperfect, conformity to the image and the will of God. The more his perceptions are cleared and his will purified, the more his faith strengthens; the more simple his views become, the more his thoughts and affections reduce themselves to that one central point, where alone perfection resides.

As he has long observed that the scheme, the show, the fashion of this life passes away, so he does not forget, that his own progress keeps pace with the world, that he also is passing away with it. Fluctuation, vicissitude, and decay, form the very characters of our being. "Nothing continueth in one stay." Surely these perpetual intimations of Scripture were intended for a constant memento, that fondness for things so transitory is as ill suited to their value as disproportioned to their duration. These constant admonitions inculcate temperance in our

joy, and moderation in our sorrow. They teach us to rejoice as if we rejoiced not, and to weep as if we wept not. Whatever is vain in the end, renders all reference to its intermediate course comparatively vain also.

The Christian observes the world around him to be most careful about the things which will end at death; his care is chiefly confined to the things which then begin; and as it is not so much to ascertain the time, as to secure the consequences of death, that he has been anxious, death can never properly be said to be sudden to him, who always knew that the event was as certain as the period was uncertain. But he does not convert the shadows of death into such a thick and substantial cloud, as shall prevent the mental eye from piercing through it, and seeing the glory beyond it. Through this deep, but pervious gloom, the bright prospect opens to that state, a glimpse of which, caught by the eye of faith, has, in all ages, enabled the sincere Christian to work through all his earthly difficulties: as it has strengthened him to encounter, with holy hope and humble confidence, the trials of life, so he trusts it will sustain him in his last conflict with the terrors of death. "Let me now," says he, "act as seeing him who is invisible, borne up by the promises of the Gospel, and strengthened by the eternal Spirit, let me anticipate my heaven, burst my present narrow bounds, shake off the incumbrance of

body, annihilate a distance in itself so short, and make that immortality which is near, present."

Thus is the image of Divine goodness more clearly, though still imperfectly, reflected in the confirmed Christian. The original character of the human heart, as it came from the hands of its Creator, is about to be re-instated in its pristine purity. Sin, the lawless tenant, not the native proprietor of the mansion, will soon be totally expelled; in the mean time, the primitive principle is radicated; the usurper is dethroned, if not altogether dispossessed; he is conquered, if not absolutely expelled; if he sometimes disturb, he can no longer destroy. The exile returns to his forsaken home, the prodigal to his father's house, the pardoned penitent to his God.

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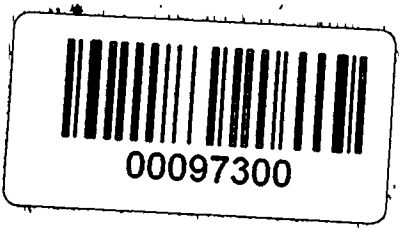
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